THE SHI'A IN MODERN SOUTH ASIA

Religion, History and Politics

Edited by
Justin Jones and Ali Usman Qasmi

The Shi'a in Modern South Asia

Religion, History and Politics

Edited by

Justin Jones
Ali Usman Qasmi

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge House, 4381/4 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi 110002, India

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107108905

First published 2015

Printed in India

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-10890-5 Hardback

Contents

Preface

This book brings together a selection of papers first presented at the conference 'Contesting Shiʿism: Isna ʿAshari and Ismaʿili Shiʿism in South Asia' held at Royal Holloway, University of London, in September 2011. The articles included here were first published as 'Isna ʿAshari and Ismaʿili Shiʿism: From South Asia to the Indian Ocean',a special issue of *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, 3 (2014).

The original conference was intended to address the fact that most scholarship on Shiʿi Islam has focused upon the supposed Shiʿi heartlands of Iran and Iraq, while academic interest in the South Asian Shiʿa has somewhat lagged behind by comparison. This is despite the region's large Shiʿi population, as well as the cultural importance that Shiʿi regimes, elites and populations have historically held across the subcontinent. Recent years, however, have seen the production of a wealth of important studies within this rapidly expanding field, and it is hoped that the papers included within this volume will contribute to these discussions, and introduce readers to many of the conversations in current progress.

These articles are authored by numerous active scholars working across a range of disciplines, including history, religious studies, anthropology and political science. They explore the historical and contemporary dynamics of various South Asian Shiʿi communities – both Isna ʿAshari and Ismaʿili – over the last two centuries, and focus upon a range of Shiʿi centres including Karachi, Lucknow, Bombay and Hyderabad, as well as South Asian Shiʿi diasporic communities in East Africa. Taken *en masse*, these essays demonstrate the enduring vitality of these communities, whose members have responded in a range of ways to the opportunities and challenges of the complex religious, social and political changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We hope that these essays together will further facilitate a greater recognition of the historical influence of Shiʿism within South Asian Islamic cultures and

societies more broadly, and will help to establish South Asia at the centre, rather than the margins, of studies of the Shi‘a in the modern world.

For enabling the original conference to take place, we would like to thank our hosts at Royal Holloway, as well as the Newton International Fellowship Scheme, jointly run by the British Academy and the Royal Society, for their generous sponsorship of the event. We would also like to thank all participants and attendees at the event for their valued contributions. Special thanks are owed to Professor Francis Robinson for his support, and for his plenary address which is re-published here. We would also like to thank Professor Sarah Ansari, as well as Charlotte de Blois and the rest of the editorial team of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* both for all their hard work in bringing the original special issue of the journal into being, and for their permission for the republication of these papers. Lastly, we are greatly indebted to Suvadip Bhattacharjee and others at Cambridge University Press, India for bringing this book to fruition.

Justin Jones
Ali Usman Qasmi

Introduction
The Shi'a in South Asia

Francis Robinson

The Shi'i communities of South Asia, roughly 60 million people, represent, after those of Iran, the second largest grouping of Shi'as in the Muslim world. Until recently our knowledge of them has not matched their numbers. Indeed, they, and here I refer to the Twelver Shi'as rather than the Isma'ilis, have suffered from the paradox of being both highly visible but in scholarly terms largely invisible. Where the Shi'a live in South Asian towns and cities, arguably, no community has been more visible or more audible: visible because of their great processions at Muharram; and audible, certainly at Muharram, but also throughout the year in their *majalis*, as they recount the events of Karbala, often transmitting them by loudspeaker to the *muhalla*.

Up to the 1980s these significant religious communities had attracted just two major works of scholarship: Hollister's, *The Shi'a of India* (1936) and Engineer's *The Bohras* (1980).[1] This dearth of scholarship began to change in the mid-1980s. First there was S. A. A. Rizvi's major two-volume survey of India's Twelver Shi'as (1986), followed by Juan Cole's path-breaking study of the establishment of the Shi'i state of Awadh from the eighteenth century (1988).[2] From the 1990s attention turned to Shi'i commemorative practice with Vernon Schubel's study of Shi'i devotional rituals (1993), David Pinault's studies of ritual and popular piety (1992) and devotional life

[1] John Norman Hollister, *The Shi'a of India*, (London, 1953); Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Bohras* (New Delhi, 1980).

[2] Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, in 2 Vols. (Canberra, 1986); J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh,* 1722–1859 (Berkeley, 1988).

(2001) which were followed in similar vein by Toby Howarth's examination of Shiʿi preaching in Hyderabad (2005) and Syed Akbar Hyder's exploration of the role of Shiʿi martyrdom in South Asian memory (2006).[3] Subsequently there have been two important studies of the Khoja Ismaʿilis: Marc van Grondelle's demonstration of the role of British imperial power in turning them into a successful transnational community (2009) and Teena Purohit's demonstration of how the Khoja Ismaʿilis were created in their particular Muslim form by the removal of pluralistic religious practices from their devotions (2012).[4] The year 2012 saw Justin Jones' authoritative work on the creative responses of Lucknow's Twelver Shiʿas after the British brought Shiʿi political power to an end.[5] At the same time, and not before time, serious attention began to be paid to the role of women in Shiʿi devotional practice in books by Karen Ruffle (2011) and Diana D'Souza (2012), which both focussed on the Shiʿi women of Hyderabad.[6]

The essays in this book illustrate how research is being pressed forward on a broad front. In particular they illustrate how scholars are beginning to develop a grasp of religious change amongst the Shiʿas over the past two centuries to match that which has been achieved for the Sunnis. The following themes, all present to a greater or lesser extent in modern scholarship on the Shiʿa of South Asia, run through these essays: there is the role of political power, but also its lack, in establishing and shaping Shiʿi communities; there is the centrality of the tragedy of Karbala to Shiʿi identity and to the Shiʿi sense of community; there is the tendency, as time moves towards the present, for Shiʿi practices of pluralism and inclusiveness to weaken in favour of exclusiveness; then, associated with this development, there is the impact of religious reform, and significant religious change, which compares suggestively with religious change in the Sunni world; there is the enduring impact of Iran, the Shiʿi centres in Iraq and more recently Shiʿi activism in

---

3 Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shiʿi Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, 1993); David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York, 1992), and *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (Houndmills, 2001); Toby Howarth, *The Twelver Shiʿa as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears* (Abingdon, 2005); Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York, 2006).

4 Marc van Grondelle, *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire and Islam, 1839–1969* (London, 2009); Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

5 Justin Jones, *Shiʿa Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012).

6 Karen G. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shiʿism* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Diane D'Souza, *Shia Women: Muslim Faith and Practice* (New Delhi, 2012).

the Lebanon; and finally there is the specific role of women in fashioning Shiʿi devotion and community.

Let us turn to the role of power, or its lack, in shaping Shiʿi communities. While not forgetting the role of the networks of Ismaʿili missionaries across land and sea, or indeed, the continuing role of Twelver Shiʿi missionary activity as set out by Amir Ahmad Khan in this issue, political power has played the key role in establishing Shiʿi communities in South Asia. Thus Fatimid power in Sind in the tenth and eleventh centuries established the basis on which Ismaʿilis were able to establish themselves in the Indus Valley. Thus, too, the Shiʿi Deccan sultanates (the Bahmani 1307–1527, the Bidari 1489–1619, the Qutb Shahi 1518–1657, and the ʿAdil Shahi 1527–1686), the last two of which had strong Safawid connections, created the framework for the establishment of Shiʿi communities in the region. The presence, moreover, of powerful Shiʿas in the administration of the Sunni Asaf Jahi regime in Hyderabad, in particular the great late-nineteenth century prime minister, Sir Salar Jung, helped the further consolidation of a Shiʿi presence. Turning to northern India, we can say the same for the Nawabs of Awadh, descendants of the Iranian soldier of fortune, Saʿadat Khan, Burhan ul-Mulk, who in Lucknow laid the foundations of the greatest centre of Shiʿi culture and scholarship outside the Shiʿi cities of Iran and Iraq.[7]

Colonial power also had a role to play in supporting and shaping Shiʿi communities. The British rulers of the United Provinces always paid especial attention to the Shiʿi *mujtahids* of Lucknow, doubtless concerned in part at least to counter the influence of the powerful Sunni *ʿulama* of the city. Of course, this was a double-edged benefit from the point of view of the *mujtahids*: while it was probably useful to have the ear of the colonial authorities, it did not do to be seen to be too close to them. This said, the major example of Shiʿi communities being shaped by colonial power lies in the relationship between the British, the Aga Khans and the Khoja Ismaʿilis. It was a Bombay High Court decision of 1866, recognising Aga Khan I as the hereditary Imam of the Ismaʿilis, which helped this fugitive from Iran both to assert his authority over many of the Khoja Ismaʿilis of India's west coast but also to build up huge wealth.[8] This position enabled his grandson, Aga Khan III, over a period of half a century, to develop relationships with the British governments in Delhi and in London which were cemented in a relationship with the British royal family rooted in shared love of thoroughbred horses

[7] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism.*

[8] Purohit, *Aga Khan Case*; Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 155–178.

and racing. During this period Aga Khan III, by working through British power, was able to help the spread of his community's influence throughout the Indian Ocean region and beyond.[9]

The contributions to this issue add to our understanding of power and the shaping of Shiʿi communities. Sajjad Rizvi here shows how the scholar, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli Nasirabadi (1753–1820), developed a theology combining 'anti-Sunnism, anti-Akhbarism, and anti-Sufism, coupled with a critique of philosophy' to support Nawabi power in northern India. It ran alongside the development of the *marsiya* tradition as a means of entrenching Shiʿi values in popular culture. The overall package gave Twelver Shiʿism a distinctive, and for many Sunnis a provocative, presence. Tahir Kamran tells of how this new assertiveness, expressed through *tabarra* (the ritual cursing of the first three Caliphs), was received in the Punjab where in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it led to abrasive relationships with the Chishti *pirs* of Sial Sharif.

As the Twelver Shiʿi presence was shaped by power, so it also came to be shaped by lack of power. Justin Jones shows how Dildar ʿAli's descendant, Sayyid ʿAli Naqi, fashioned a new interpretation of Imam Husain under colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century, developing a distinctly twentieth-century Protestantised Shiʿism based on a model of the demystification and moral perfection of the human condition, alongside a political project in which Husain's message was used as the basis for anti-colonial protest accompanied by support for Indian nationalism. Moving from politics to socio-economic advancement, Shireen Mirza shows how the Khoja Shiʿi Tanzeem organisation in contemporary Hyderabad uses Shiʿi tradition to develop an activist stance towards life. It pays particular attention to poorer students, seeking "to identify self-reliance as part of a collective strategy of modernisation and survival". Hizbollah's defeat of Israel in the Lebanon is presented to them as an example of a successful Shiʿi movement striving to achieve justice and progress.

Once Shiʿi communities have become established, the regular telling of the story of Karbala, the regular mourning of its martyrs, and the taking out of *taʿziya* processions during Muharram have played the central role in the creation and re-creation of a Shiʿi sense of identity, and by the same token a central role in the consolidation of Shiʿi community. Toby Howarth's excellent analysis both of *majlis* addresses in Hyderabad, and of the circumstances in which they have been given, provides a strong sense of the processes at work. In the Hyderabadi context, moreover, these are not

9 Van Grondelle, *The Ismaʿilis.*

just ritual performances but ones in which the conveyance of meaning in words is crucial. The language used has moved from Persian to Urdu and recently has included English. Howarth reminds us, too, of the frequency of remembrance. In addition to the mourning ceremonies on the first ten days of Muharram, there are a further ten set aside throughout for remembering the martyrs of Karbala, and a further forty-one on which *majlis* might be held in remembrance of members of the Prophet's family and the Imams. The emotional intensity of the performances, for this is what they are, is expressed in copious weeping, chest-beating and self-flagellation.[10] These performed acts of remembrance have been subject to substantial study in recent years.[11] Consideration has also been given to their wider resonance in South Asian culture as a whole.[12]

Given the centrality of remembrance, it is not surprising that its many aspects are never far from the arguments of the articles in this issue. Jones and Mirza both illustrate a process of reinterpretation of the central story to meet new requirements. Rizvi, as we have already noted, emphasises its naturalisation in the Awadhi environment, a process well-studied elsewhere.[13] Michel Boivin shows how the determination of some Khoja Isma'ilis to defend their traditional practices of remembrance, against the Aga Khan's attempts to ban them as part of the elevation of his status as the reincarnation of the Seventh Imam, led to their break away from the Khoja Isma'ilis to form the Twelver Khoja community. Simon Fuchs, on the other hand, illustrates the centrality of the Karbala story from another angle. Iran's ambition to lead the world Muslim community against the West after its revolution led in Pakistan to attempts to de-emphasise the Karbala story and the particular significance of the *ahl-i bait* (the Prophet's family), and to elevate instead Ayatollah Khomeini as the *marja'* (the guide to be followed) of Pakistan's Shi'as, as well as his doctrine of *vilayati-i faqih* (the rule of the jurist). The Pakistani Shi'i response indicated that not all were ready for the leadership of a single *marja'*, nor were they unanimously prepared for 'Arif Husain's version of *taqrib* (religious dialogue) between Shi'as and Sunnis.

Inclusiveness and pluralism were long part of the Shi'i tradition on the

---

10 Howarth, *The Twelver Shi'a.*

11 Schubel, *Religious Performance*; Pinault, *The Shiites*; Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*; Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood and Everyday Practice*; D'Souza, *Shi'a Women.*

12 Hyder, *Reliving Karbala.*

13 Karen G. Ruffle, 'Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire: The Indianizing of the Wedding of Qasim and Fatima Kubra', in Denis Hermann and Fazbrizio Speciale (eds.), *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 181–200.

subcontinent. Muharram processions might include town dwellers of all faiths. Shi'i places of worship and devotional performances could be designed to be inclusive.[14] Hasan Ali Khan has laid out for us the remarkable Isma'ili/Sufi/Satpanthi engagement which existed in the Indus valley from the tenth to the twentieth century CE. Isma'ili *dais*, helped by Fatimid power to enter Sind and the Multan region, came to work with Suhrawardi Sufis to create a Satpanthi tradition of worship, including amongst others Hindus and Christians. Their inclusive purpose was demonstrated in the site plans and original designs of the great Suhrawardi shrines of Multan and Uch Sharif.[15] He notes Shi'i *panjata*s on the upper parts of the shrine of Baha-ud-din Zakariya at Multan as well as a Hindu *trishul* on top of a Sufi shrine in a nineteenth-century photograph. This is a cosmopolitan heritage which in recent years the Pakistani Auqaf (Endowments) Department has been concerned to conceal.[16]

Teena Purohit has likewise recently examined the Satpanthi traditions of Gujarat. Starting from the *ginans*, devotional poetry in Gujarati, Hindustani and Sindhi which were an essential part of Satpanthi ritual, she has noted that it "synthesized religious ideas from a number of religious traditions without giving the impression that such syntheses were either forced or contradictory".[17] She goes on to demonstrate first how the struggle between the Aga Khan and the Khoja leadership undermined this religious pluralism and second how Aga Khan III amended the written traditions of his community, which among other things involved the destruction of 3,500 *ginans*, to produce a theology which focussed on his semi-divine role.[18]

Karen Ruffle has introduced us to another inclusive strategy, that of vernacularisation of the Karbala story. In the seventeenth century, the Qutb Shahis patronised a Hindu writer of *marsiyas* who translated into Urdu Mulla Kashfi's *Rawdat-al Shuhada*, his account of the marriage of the eleven-year-old Fatima Kubra and the thirteen-year-old Qasim during the battle of

---

14 See, for instance, Mushirul Hasan, 'Muharram: an individual and collective experience', in Muzaffar Ali (ed.), *A Leaf Turns Yellow: the Sufis of Awadh* (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 170–177.

15 Hasan Ali Khan, *Constructing Islam on the Indus: The Material History of the Suhwawardi Order, 1200–1500 AD*, Royal Asiatic Society Books (Delhi, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

16 Hasan Ali Khan, 'Shia-Ismaili motifs in the Sufi Architecture of the Indus Valley 1200–1500', University of London PhD dissertation, 2009. The final chapter of this thesis tells of the fate of these Shi'i-Isma'ili elements at the hands of the Pakistan Auqaf Department.

17 Purohit, *Aga Khan Case*, p. 4.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–132.

Karbala, and the subsequent martyrdom of the latter. The opportunity was seized to set out the full Indian ritual of a wedding, but decorating the hands with blood not *mehendi*, and enabling a presentation of the Karbala story to meet Indian, indeed Hindu, sensibilities. Such inclusiveness was, of course, central to the success of all expanding religious traditions.[19]

The articles in this issue confirm the general move in the direction of exclusiveness presented by Khan and Purohit. This was certainly the tendency in Sayyid Dildar Ali's anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi theology for the Shi'i Awadhi state set out by Rizvi. Kamran comparably notes the divisive impact that this theology (along with Sunni revivalism) has had on Shi'i-Sunni relations in the Punjab, talking of how 'shared synergies' were lost. Indeed, in this respect the Punjabi experience was a metaphor for Shi'i-Sunni relations across the rest of India. Arguably greater exclusiveness would also have been the impact of the contemporary and activist Shi'i message mediated to the poorer *muhallas* of Hyderabad by Mirza's Tanzeem. The Isma'ili Khojas, as depicted by Soumen Mukherjee in their latest manifestation as the Aga Khan Development Network, would appear to offer little space for those who are not community members.

This said, not all developments have been in the direction of exclusiveness. The modern challenges of power have rendered some Shi'i responses more complex; there has been a return to inclusiveness in the political field. As noted above, the influential Shi'i cleric of Pakistan, 'Arif Husain, followed the lead of Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980s-90s by seeking to create a united Muslim front, preaching in favour of religious dialogue with Sunnis in Pakistan. So, too, did Sayyid 'Ali Naqi, half a century earlier, strive to make Imam Husain an example for all humanity. In 1940s Lucknow he celebrated the 1,300th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Imam with a 'Husain Day', whose events were arranged not just by Shi'as but also by Sunnis and Hindus, and which represented not just general human protest against injustice and oppression but also a specific statement of resistance to British rule.

From the late eighteenth century a major feature of Sunni Islam in South Asia was a process of religious revival and reform. One key trigger was the loss of political power, which meant that Muslims had to learn how to create an Islamic society without power. *'Ulama* took the lead, realising that now they were no longer supported by the state, they must build a constituency for themselves in society. So they established chains of *madrasas*, translated the Qur'an and *hadith* into vernacular languages, set up *fatwa* offices, and spread

19 Ruffle, 'Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire'.

knowledge widely by adopting print and preaching widely. Features of the process were a growing encouragement for each individual Muslim to engage with central messages of Islam, and an attack on all ideas of divination, which focussed particularly on belief in Ibn al-ʻArabi's *wahdat-al wujud* (unity of being) and any idea of intercession at saints' shrines. Muslims were to be guided by God's revelation alone; their consciences, prompted as far as possible by the *ʻulama*, were the element which would preserve them from eternal damnation. There was also a new emphasis on personal responsibility in faith: Muslims knew they had to act on earth to be saved.[20]

Until recently we knew relatively little about how the Shiʻa responded to this environment. Justin Jones, however, has demonstrated how substantial the Twelver Shiʻi response, based on Lucknow, was. It ranged from considerable institutional development to missionary activity to ritual innovation.[21] The essays in this issue are full of further examples of reform at work amongst the Shiʻa. Rizvi's Sayyid Dildar ʻAli launched an assault on *wahdat-al wujud* and on Sufism in general worthy of the most extreme Sunni reformers, although we should recognise that his purpose differed from theirs. One of the reasons for the Twelver Khojas splitting from the Ismaʻili Khojas was that, perhaps mirroring practice amongst some Sunnis, they wanted their children to be taught the Qur'an, as well as scepticism of the Aga Khan's claims to charismatic spiritual leadership. Sayyid ʻAli Naqi's Husainology pioneered a Shiʻi selfhood that was human and blessed with this-worldly qualities – Husain was a moral exemplar and not an intercessor. Similar qualities of action on earth and personal responsibility were fostered by Tanzeem in Hyderabad, which was aiming to fashion a new Shiʻi community by strengthening each individual part. A similar activism on an Indian Ocean scale is exemplified in the missionary Madrasa't ul-Waʻizeen, a *madrasa* founded in Lucknow in 1919, which forms the focus of Amir Ahmad Khan's article. In the hands of the Aga Khan's followers this religious drive to serve society on earth has become transformed into the Aga Khan Development Network.

It is evident from what has been stated above that the Shiʻi communities of South Asia were substantially supported by outside influence, in particular from Iran. The essays in this issue offer further evidence of this process. Sayyid

---

20 Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900*, (Princeton, 1982); Francis Robinson, 'Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 105–121 and Francis Robinson 'Other-Worldly and This-Worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival', in Francis Robinson *Islam, South Asia and the West* (Delhi, 2007), pp. 171–188.

21 Jones, *Shiʻa Islam*, pp. 32–146.

Dildar ʻAli was specifically sent by the prime minister of Awadh to the shrine cities of Iraq as part of a programme to build a class of *ʻulama* to support the new Shiʻi state. In spite of the fact that Dildar ʻAli returned as a proponent of Usulism as opposed to the Akhbari ideas he had been supposed to develop, the plan succeeded beyond expectation, leading to the establishment of the greatest of Lucknow's Shiʻi scholarly families, the Khandan-i Ijtihad, and enduring connections between Lucknow and the traditional intellectual centres of Iran and Iraq. Arguably, the Aga Khan was the most significant Iranian presence in Bombay in the nineteenth century. There, as Nile Green has shown us, he joined a large community of Iranian exiles to use the opportunities of the great port city to impose his authority over the Ismaʻili Khojas and to begin the process of spreading his neo-Ismaʻilism through the Indian Ocean region.[22] Amir Ahmad Khan makes clear the various connections of birth of marriage, of scholarship and of religious allegiance of the Mahmudabad family, the largest Muslim landholders in northern India, which would make them an ongoing channel of connection to the Shiʻi world of West Asia. The new assertiveness of the Shiʻa in that region after the Iranian revolution and the rise of Hizbollah in the Lebanon was reflected both in Pakistan and in India, as Fuchs and Mirza show respectively. This raises the issue of how the even greater Shiʻi militancy of recent years will play out in the region.

Influence, however, has not been all one way. One of the striking features of the Islamic history of South Asia since the eighteenth century is how a region, which had for long been a receiver of influences from the West, has also come to be a broadcaster of influences in the opposite direction.[23] The missionary work of the Mahmudabad family's Madrasa't ul-Waʻizeen is one example of this. But so also is the striking suggestion from Jones that Ayatollah Khomeini may have been influenced by Sayyid ʻAli Naqi's Husainology. Mirza shows how the Twelver Shiʻi diaspora throughout the Indian Ocean region was linked by its trading networks, its use of print, and its ties to the Shiʻi centres in Iraq. This connected community came to be reflected in institutions like the World Islamic Network (founded 1991), which strives to disseminate 'modernist' Islamic ideas beyond the boundaries of its community while focussing surplus capital on community

---

22 Green, *Bombay Islam*, pp. 118–178.

23 Francis Robinson 'South Asia and West Asia from the Delhi Sultanate to the Present: Security, Resources and Influence', Ministry of Higher Education, *Working Papers: Symposium on the Academic Chairs of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and their Contribution to the Development of Human Knowledge* (Oman: Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), pp. 74–86.

development. Mukherjee demonstrates how the Aga Khan's section of the old Khoja community has come to spread its social service ethic both through the same region as the Twelver Khojas but also more widely. In the process, as he puts it, they have come to 'realise the social conscience of Islam through institutional action'. The projection of Shi'i ideas and values from South Asia to the rest of the world is a developing story of great interest.

It is a matter of surprise that there are only passing mentions of women in the essays in this issue. But current scholarship on women's contribution to religious activity, indeed religious leadership, in Islam is much more ambitious than this would suggest. For the Sunni world, recent work on women's religious authority - indeed women's authority over men - includes Muhammad Akram Nadwi's *al-Muhaddithat*, his 400-page introduction in English to his twenty-four volume work in Arabic recording the contributions of women to the transmission of knowledge.[24] There is Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach's *Women, Leadership and Mosques*, which offers examples of women exercising authority over men.[25] In addition there is recent work illustrating women's religious leadership of women.[26]

As far as the Shi'i women of South Asia are concerned Pinault, Ruffle and D'Souza have studied Hyderabadi representations of the women of the household of the Imams. Ruffle tells us of how women have relished the examples of these 'strong women',[27] while D'Souza marvels at the confidence and determination of some women determined to go on pilgrimage to Karbala without their menfolk.[28] This said, given the great social changes of the past fifty years, the many different South Asian environments in which Shi'i lives have been lived, and the many new roles that women are performing, there would appear to be many opportunities for research on the interactions between social change, new social aspirations and the images of perfection scholars choose to represent in the household of the Imams.

The other main dimension is the active role taken by women in transmitting

24 Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *al-Muhaddithat: the woman scholars in Islam* (Oxford, 2007).

25 Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmback, *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden and Boston, 2011).

26 For the Sunni world recent works are: Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005), and Sadaf Ahmad, *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism among Urban Pakistani Women* (Syracuse, 2009). For the Shi'i world there is Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, 2006).

27 Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood*, p. 20.

28 D'Souza, *Shi'a Women*, p. 240.

the message of Karbala. Scott Kugle in a remarkable and ingenious article has explained the role of the courtesan Mah Laqa Bai (1768–1824) in sustaining what he terms "a dignified place for Shia devotion in a Sunni court" through her poetry, a full *diwan* of Urdu *ghazal*s. She was able to do so not just because of the quality of her compositions but because she was attached successively to the households of two Hyderabadi prime ministers.[29] Writing in early-nineteenth century Lucknow, Mrs Meer Hasan ʻAli tells of the numbers of women's *majali*s held in Muharram.[30] Recently Howarth and D'Souza have recorded the major role played by women preachers in Hyderabad. D'Souza reminds us that it is possible for a woman to become a *mujtahid*, although the few who have achieved such positions in South Asia have come from Iran and Iraq.[31] Women still find their role of leadership primarily in giving sermons to other women. However, given the changes slowly taking place in Muslim societies, and in the world at large, women will come to expand their role.

I hope that there is enough here to indicate that the Shiʻi communities of South Asia are a rewarding subject of study. The essays in this book, alongside other recent published research, indicate that the dearth of scholarship is at an end. Indeed, there is in general a rich scholarship devoted to Shiʻi ritual devotion, and a growing scholarship, despite the gap in this book, devoted to Shiʻi women. On the other hand, what the articles in this book indicate in particular are the growing lineaments of, to use a term developed by Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, Shiʻi 'religious internationals': both Isna ʻAshari and Khoja Ismaʻili.[32] They also point to processes of religious change which offer possibilities for comparison not just with the Sunni world of South Asia, but also with the non-Muslim faiths of the region.

---

29 Scott Kugle, 'Courting ʻAli: Urdu Poetry, Shiʻi Piety and Courtesan Power in Hyderabad' in Hermann and Speziale, *Muslim Cultures*, pp. 125–166.

30 Mrs Meer Hassan Ali, W. Crooke ed., *Observations on the Mussulmauns of Indiadescriptive of their Manners, Customs, Habits and Religious Opinions made during a Twelve Years' Residence in their immediate society* (London, Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 17–54.

31 D'Souza, *Shia Women*, p. 20.

32 Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene eds., *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 1–19.

1 Faith Deployed for a New Shiʿi Polity in India

The Theology of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli Nasirabadi[1]

Sajjad Rizvi

As the central authority of the Mughal Empire collapsed and was replaced with multiple centres of power and culture, in historiography the eighteenth century in North India is often considered through the lens of crisis, disintegration and instability.[2] Delhi, decentred, became only one of a number of areas of social and political negotiation, partially eclipsed by new cities of probably greater political and cultural significance. These cities had been founded by notables and officials of the declining empire who established themselves as independent rulers: Farrukhabad, Najibabad and Rampur under the Rohillas, Faizabad and Lucknow under the nawabs of

1 An original version of this paper was presented at a workshop at Royal Holloway, University of London, in September 2011 and I am grateful to Justin Jones for the invitation and discussion. I thank Francis Robinson and Saiyid Nizamuddin Ahmad for their comments on the written version. Another version was presented at the seminar of the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas at Austin in October 2013. I am grateful to Syed Akbar Hyder for the invitation and to Gail Minault, Kamran Ali, Azfar Moin and other participants for their valuable comments and discussion.

2 Seema Alavi, "Introduction", in *The Eighteenth Century in India*, (ed.) Seema Alavi (Delhi, 2002), pp. 1–41; Richard Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British 1720–1801* (Berkeley, 1980); Michael Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals* (New Delhi, 1988); Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48* (New Delhi, 1986), esp. pp. 204ff; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shāh Walī-Allāh and His Times: A Study of Eighteenth Century Islam, Politics and Society in India* (Canberra, 1980), pp. 111–173.

Awadh and Murshidabad in Bengal.[3] Similarly, a number of the towns and administrative centres (*qasba*s) in Awadh, – for example, Nasirabad, Sandila, Sihali (the hometown of the divines and sages of Farangi Mahall in Lucknow), Kakori and Khayrabad – rose to prominence, producing their own forms of courtly and learned culture that provided scholars and literati for the new centres such as Lucknow. In this sense, the *qasba*s were depositories and determinants of the contested Islamic traditions: Sunni vs. Shiʿi, scripturalist vs. rationalist, nomocentric vs. mystically inclined.[4] Of great significance in this process was the rise of successor states and new centres that had been founded and ruled by Shiʿi notables, usually of Iranian origin, who promoted their faith to legitimise their authority, patronising both the culture and scholarship of the Shiʿi learned classes.

The most prominent of these areas was Awadh, focusing first on Faizabad and then later on Lucknow. Given the previous marginality of the Shiʿi presence in North India (at least beyond some limited elite circles at the Mughal court, especially in the reign of Jahangir), the power that lay with the Shiʿi notables in these new centres, as well as at the court in Delhi, meant that Shiʿi thought and practices flourished throughout the century. In the face of this new challenge, there was a striking response from Sunni elites, both political and religious. In the eighteenth century there was a spike in polemical literature produced by both sides in the shape of learned theological treatises, popular disputational tracts, poetic invectives, and commemoration and satire. The new Persianate and Shiʿi centres of power encouraged new waves of migrations of scholars and literati to India, especially Iranian Shiʿi ʿulamaʾ, who found a welcome home in Awadh as recounted by Hazin-i Lahiji (d. 1766) and Aqa Ahmad Bihbahani (d. 1819), although they did not fail to grumble about the weather and the stupidity of their generous hosts.[5] While

[3] Muhammad Umar, *Urban Culture in Northern India during the Eighteenth Century* (Delhi, 2001), pp. 1–42.

[4] Jamal Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien: Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 42–64, 105–125; Muhammad Umar, *Islam in Northern India during the Eighteenth Century* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 192–200; Mushirul Hasan, *From Pluralism to Separatism: Qasbas in Colonial Awadh* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 1–51, although it is hard to accept his argument for pluralism in the period that we are considering here.

[5] Rizvi, *Shāh Walī-Allāh*, p. 183; Shaykh Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī, *Tārīkh va safarnāma*, (ed.) ʿAlī Davānī (Tehran, 1375 Sh/1996), pp. 270–286 (his account was written in Delhi in 1742); F. C. Belfour, *The Life of Sheikh Mohammed Ali Hazin* (Bombay, 1911), pp. 82–103; Aḥmad Bihbahānī (writing in Patna in 1809), *Mirʾāt al-aḥwāl-i jahān-numā: Safarnāma-yi Hind*, compiled by Shāʾista Khān (Patna, 1992), pp. 239ff. For a discussion of these texts, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discovery,*

Shiʿi commemorations, particularly during Muharram, were established and patronised by notables, they became more prominent in the period and led to Sunni condemnations especially at the centre of empire in Delhi.[6]

It is within these new contexts - the challenge of power, new opportunities of patronage and the ascendance of Shiʿi power - that the career of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli and his role in the formulation of a new Shiʿi theological and political dispensation in Awadh needs to be examined. For those familiar with North Indian Shiʿi Islam, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli (1753–1820) is a well-known scholar credited with the formation of a rationalising hierocracy in the new Shiʿi polity of Awadh in North India at the end of the eighteenth century. The processes by which the elites established Twelver Shiʿi doctrines and their practices, disseminating them so much that they still provide the basic motifs and parameters of modern Shiʿi identity in the subcontinent, have been studied by Juan Cole and others. Awadh witnessed the development of a political theology, the establishment of institutions of learning and commemoration, and the production of literature for disseminating Shiʿi ideas in the scholarly and elite Mughal languages of Arabic and Persian as well as in the vernacular Urdu. At the heart of Awadhi culture lay a vernacularisation and naturalisation of Shiʿi Islam within an Indian *milieu*.[7]

While his polemical works countering anti-Shiʿi texts such as *Tuhfa-yi isnaʿashariya* [Gift for the Twelver Shiʿa] of Shah ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (1745–1823), and his attacks on Sufis and Akhbaris who contended with him over the central questions of spiritual authority, have been the subjects of some studies, the broad outlines of Dildar ʿAli's philosophical works and philosophical theology – which provided the foundations for these polemics and exchanges – have been rather neglected. This article will draw upon his major theological texts, such as *Mir'at al-ʿuqul fi ʿilm usul al-din* [Mirrors of the intellect expounding the science of the principles of the faith], better known as *ʿImad al-Islam* [The foundation of Islam], his anti-Sufi polemic *al-Shihab al-thaqib* [The lightening strike] and his condemnation of Akhbarism,

1400–1800 (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 229–242; Rasūl Jaʿfarīyān, "Murūrī bar Mir'āt al-aḥvāl-i jahān-numā", in *Maqālāt-i tārīkhī* (Qum, 1417/1996), pp. 97–120; Juan Cole, "Mirror of the world: Iranian 'orientalism' and early 19th century India", *Critique*, V (1996), pp. 41–60 and Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-intellectual History of the Isnāʿasharī Shīʿīs in India* (Canberra, 1986), vol. II, pp. 121–125. Another important Iranian traveller who was well received was Mīr ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Shūshtarī (d. 1805) in his *Tuḥfat al-ʿālam*, (ed.) Ṣamad Muvaḥḥid (Tehran, 1984).

6 Rizvi, *Shāh Walī-Allāh*, pp. 190–195.

7 A good, though uncritical, account of the state's promotion of Shiʿi culture is Farūgh Kāẓimī, *Shāhān-i Avadh aur shīʿīyat* (Lucknow, 1999).

Asas al-usul [The basis of jurisprudence]. Significantly all of these works were written in Arabic, demonstrating his scholarly credentials and reflecting his desire to establish the new theology on a firm foundation to demonstrate the contribution of Indian Shiʿi *ʿulama* to the new directions in thought and institutional practice emerging in Iran and Iraq. The most important of these is *ʿImad al-Islam*. Divided into the classic five-fold scheme of Shiʿi theology, it not only demonstrates the contribution of the *ʿulama* of India to Shiʿi thought towards a "new theology", it also posits the basic metaphysical foundations for the critique of others, whether Sunni scholars of Farangi Mahall and elsewhere, Sufi *pir*s or traditionist Akhbaris. It was widely disseminated and popular in scholarly Shiʿi circles well beyond the annexation of the Awadh state. In some concluding remarks, this article will also consider some of the critiques of his work.

Sayyid Dildar ʿAli was born into a family of Naqvi *sayyid*s in Ja'is-Nasirabad in Rae Bareilly district of Awadh in 1166/1752–1753.[8] His father Sayyid Muʿin bin ʿAbd al-Hadi was a local landowner and provided his son with the leisure to pursue scholarship. He began his early studies in the *dars-i*

[8] Āghā Mahdī Lakhnavī, *Savāniḥ-i ḥayāt-i ḥażrat-i Ghufrān-ma'āb* (Karachi, 1982), especially 15–43; Mīrzā Muḥammad ʿAlī Kashmīrī, *Nujūm al-samā' fī tarājim al-ʿulamā'*, (ed.) Mīr Hāshim Muḥaddith (Tehran, 1382 Sh/2003), pp. 370–374; Sayyid al-ʿUlamā', *Janāb-i Ghufrān-ma'āb* (Lucknow, 1958); Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAbbās Shūshtarī al-Jazā'irī, *Awrāq al-dhahab*, ed. Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Ṭurayḥī (Beirut, 2007), pp. 319–339; Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nawgānvī, *Taẕkira-yi Bē bahā tārīkh al-ʿulamā'* (New Delhi, 2010), pp. 154–160; Rizvi, *Shīʿīs in India*, vol. II, pp. 128–138; Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 61–66; Sayyid Aḥmad Hindī, *Warathat al-anbiyā'* (Lucknow, 1918), p. 3; Raḥmān ʿAlī, *Taẕkira-yi ʿulamā'-yi Hind* (Lucknow, 1914), pp. 60–61; Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥasanī al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir wa-bahjat al-masāmiʿ wa-l-manāẓir* (Beirut, 1999), pp. 966–967; Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī al-Kāẓimī, *Aḥsan al-wadīʿa fī tarājim ashhar mashāhīr mujtahidī al-shīʿa* (Baghdad, 1929), pp. 4–11; Sayyid Murtażā Ḥusayn, *Maṭlaʿ-yi anvār* (Karachi, 1982), pp. 220–227; Masʿūd al-Anvār ʿAlavī Kākorvī, *Awadh kē chand ʿarabī ʿulamā'* (Lucknow, 2000), pp. 73–108; Mīrzā Jaʿfar Ḥusayn, *Qadīm lakhnaw kī ākhirī bahār* (New Delhi, 1981), pp. 229–232; Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī ʿAẓmat Kākorvī, *Tavārīkh-i mulk-i Awadh musammā bih Muraqqaʿ-yi Khusravī* (Lucknow, 1986), pp. 422–423. Important contemporary primary sources include the anonymous *Ā'īna-yi ḥaqq-numā* (MS Nāṣiriyya, rijāl shīʿa 1) written by a student of Dildār ʿAlī, *Tadhkirat al-ʿulamā'* of Sayyid Mahdī bin Najaf ʿAlī, *Shudhūr al-ʿiqyān fī tarājim al-aʿyān* (MS National Library Kolkata, Buhar Collection 278) of Sayyid Iʿjāz Ḥusayn Kintūri, *al-Maqāmiʿ al-ḥaydarīya* [gloss on *Ā'īna-yi ḥaqqnumā]* of Sayyid ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Ḥusaynī (MS British Library, Delhi Persian 1190, fol. 188v–284r), and al-*Ḥisn al-matīn fī aḥwāl al-wuzarā' wa-l-salāṭīn* of Sayyid ʿAbbās Ardistānī (MS National Archives of India, Arabic 235 and 236). I am grateful to James Onley for procuring a copy of the last one for me.

nizami tradition of intellectual disciplines with both Sunni and Shiʿi teachers: Sayyid Ghulam Husain Dakani Ilahabadi, Mulla Haydar ʿAli Sandilvi (d. 1225/1810, the Sunni son of the Shiʿi philosopher Mulla Hamdullah) and Mulla Babullah Barelwi Jaunpuri who were philosophers.[9] He later pursued his studies with the leading Shiʿi savant of Awadh, Tafazzul Husayn Khan (d. 1801) between 1769 and 1772, particularly focusing on astronomy and the exact sciences, and with the renowned Mulla ʿAbd ʿAli Bahr al-ʿUlum of Farangi Mahall (d. 1801) for two years at Shahjahanpur, the capital of Hafiz Rahmat Khan until his defeat by Shujaʿ al-Dawla in 1774.[10] He was also reported to have disputed with Mulla Hasan (d. 1794) of Farangi Mahall, both in Shahjahanpur and Lucknow. At this stage, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli was primarily someone with a keen mind for philosophy – while at the same time, consistent with the Shiʿi preferences in North India, a scripturalist Akhbari who was hostile to independent legal reasoning in the derivation of precepts. Such a combination seems contradictory and one wonders whether the insistence upon a juvenile scripturalism was used later as a trope to denigrate the position; while it is often asserted that the Shiʿa in North India were Akhbari up to this point, we do not have much contemporary evidence for this. However, it does indicate the success of the intellectual tendency of the

---

9 On Sayyid Ghulām Ḥusayn, see al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 1053; on Mullā Ḥaydar ʿAlī, see Fażl-i Imām Khayrābādī, *ʿAmad-nāma*, ed. Intiẓāmullāh Shahābī (Karachi, 1956), pp. 2–3, al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 960, and Raḥmān ʿAlī, *Taẕkira-yi ʿulamāʾ-yi Hind*, pp. 54–55; on Mullā Bābullāh, see Khayrābādī, *ʿAmad-nāma*, p. 8. The latter two had been students of Mullā Ḥamdullāh.

10 On Tafażżul Ḥusayn Khān, see al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 940; Rizvi, *Shīʿīs in India*, vol. II, pp. 227–230. ʿAbd ʿAlī, having spent fifteen years with Ḥāfiẓ Raḥmat Khān, fled and found another Rohilla patron in Rampur. See Raḥmān ʿAlī, *Taẕkira-yi ʿulamāʾ-yi Hind* (Lucknow, 1914), pp. 122–123; al-Lakhnawī, *Nuhzat al-khawāṭir*, pp. 1021–1023; Mullā Valīullāh Farangī-Maḥallī, *al-Aghṣān al-arbaʿa li-l-shajara al-ṭayyība*(Lucknow, 1881), pp. 121–126; Muftī Rażā Anṣārī, *Bānī-yi dars-i niẓāmī* (Lucknow, 1973), pp. 103–125; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, p. 73; Charles Hamilton, *An Historical Relation of the Origin, Progress, and Final Dissolution of the Government of the Rohilla Afghans in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan* (London, 1787), pp. 220–237; Muḥammad Fayżbakhsh, *Farraḥbakhsh*, tr. William Hoey, *Memoirs of Delhi and Faizabad, being a translation of the "Tārīkh Farrahbakhsh" of Muhammad Faiz-Bakhsh from the original Persian* (Allahabad, 1888), vol. II, pp. 3–12; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, pp. 48–49; Barnett, *North India between Empires*, pp. 92–93; Dawr Āfrīdī, *Tārīkh-i rūhilkhand* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 57–77 on the conflict between Shujāʿ al-Dawla and Ḥāfiẓ Raḥmat Khān and his consequent death; cf. Muḥammad Najm al-Ghanī Khān Rāmpūrī, *Tārīkh-i Awadh* (Lucknow, 1976), pp. 314–331; Kākorvī, *Tavārīkh-i mulk-i Awadh musammā bih Muraqqaʿ-yi Khusravī*, p. 68; Muṣṭafā Ḥusayn Niẓāmī, *Tārīkh-i Rūhilkhand 1707 tā 1775: Gul-i raḥmat ka taqābulī jāʾiza* (Lucknow, 1986), pp. 105–111.

dars-i nizami in influencing scholarship between the Sunni *shaikhzada*s of the towns of Awadh, extending to the Shiʿi landowners and *ʿulama*. After the defeat of the Rohillas, and the establishment of Lucknow as the new capital of Shujaʿ al-Dawla in 1775, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli moved there and soon came to the attention of the vizier Hasan Riza Khan (served 1776–1798), a Mughal notable married into the family of the nawabs and renowned patron of poets and scholars.[11]

Given the absence of a serious class of *ʿulama* in the new state, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli was sent by Hasan Riza Khan to study in the shrine cities of Iraq in 1779. He was funded by the notable Almas ʿAli Khan who had urged the vizier to send some Akhbari-minded young scholars to Iraq to finish their education.[12] He was supposedly so attached to the Akhbari cause that the only book that he took to Iraq was *al-Fawa'id al-madaniya* [Medinan arguments) of Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1626). He spent three years there, changed his position to an Usuli one, open to the use of independent legal reasoning, and picked up *ijaza*s (certificates authorising juristic practice) from the eminent Shaikh Muhammad Baqir 'Vahid' Bihbahani (d. 1791). The latter was the scholar and religious leader in Karbala most responsible for eradicating Akhbaris from the shrine cities. His students included Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Tabataba'i Bahr al-ʿUlum (d. 1799) and Shaikh Jaʿfar Najafi Kashif al-Ghita' (d. 1813) – they also issued certificates for Sayyid Dildar ʿAli.[13] It was in Najaf that he first encountered *al-Shawahid al-Makkiya* [Meccan witnesses] of Sayyid Nur al-Din ʿAli al-ʿAmili (d. 1658), a refutation of Astarabadi, although he did not find it very convincing – a position that he later reiterated in his *Asas al-usul*. In Mashhad on his return to India, he received an *ijaza* from Sayyid Mahdi Shahristani Isfahani (d. 1803), a scholar with an established link to the court in Lucknow.

Back in Lucknow in 1781, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli became well established. The recipient of the patronage of Bahu Begum, he received the title of *mujtahid al-ʿasr* (leading jurist of the age) from Asaf al-Dawla,[14] and was by the end of his life such an important figure that he was the one who

---

11 Abū Ṭālib Iṣfahānī, *Tafżīḥ al-ghāfilīn* [History of Asafu'd Daulah Nawab Wazir of Oudh], tr. William Hoey, (Allahabad, 1885), p. 3; Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, pp. 66–67; Hamid A. Qureshi, *The Mughals, The English, and the Rulers of Awadh from 1722 to 1856* (Lucknow, 2003), pp. 83, 124–128.

12 Anon., *Āʾīna-yi ḥaqq-numā*, fol. 47; Kintūrī, *Shudhūr al-ʿiqyān*, vol. I, fol. 136r; Ardistānī, *al-Ḥisn al-matīn*, vol. I, pp. 91–92.

13 Anon., *Āʾīna-yi ḥaqq-numā*, fols. 51v–56v.

14 Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, p. 77; Qureshi, *The Rulers of Awadh*, p. 253.

crowned Ghazi ud-Din Hayder in 1819 as the first King of Awadh.[15] He was awarded the income of nine tax-exempt villages as well as a stipend of 5,000 rupees.[16] Mulla Muhammad ʿAli Kashmiri wrote a treatise on the need for the new Shiʿi state to establish the Friday prayers and suggested Sayyid Dildar ʿAli as a worthy prayer leader; one source on the reign of Asaf al-Dawla even suggests that he was the first person to lead Shiʿi congregational prayers in North India.[17] Earlier Shiʿi *ʿulama* such as the Akhbari court mufti Sayyid Muhammad ʿAskari Jaunpuri (d. 1777) opposed the establishment of the congregational prayers partly in order not to arouse the hostility of the Sunnis. On the entreaty of the vizier, the first Friday congregation was held in Lucknow on the significant date of 13 Rajab 1200/May 1786.[18] Sayyid Dildar ʿAli used the pulpit at the recently completed Asafiyya mosque to spread his theology, and a collection of his sermons was published as *Fava'id-i Asafiya*. He later wrote an independent treatise on the obligation to establish the Friday prayers. Through his link to the *ʿulama* in Iraq, ties were strengthened – more students went there to study and the Awadh state invested more in developing the infrastructure of the shrine cities, including the famous Hindiyya canal near Karbala to channel water for the city (funded by Asaf al-Dawla) and provided gifts for the upkeep and repair of the shrines themselves, especially after the Wahhabi attacks in 1801 and 1802.[19]

Sayyid Dildar ʿAli established a dynasty of scholars known now as the *khandan-i-ijtihad*.[20] He had five sons, the most important of whom were the eldest Sayyid Muhammad (1784–1867), who continued his father's theological project writing works against Akhbaris and penning *al-ʿUjala al-nafiʿa* [The beneficial dawning] on Shiʿi theology, and under royal charter establishing Madrasa-yi Sultaniya in the 1840s, and his youngest Sayyid Husayn (1797–1856) known as Sayyid al-ʿUlama'.[21] Sayyid Mahdi

15 Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, pp. 136–138.

16 Anon., *Āʾīna-yi ḥaqq-numā*, fols. 65–67; Cole, *The Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, pp. 179–180.

17 Cf. al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 1101; Sayyid Ghulām ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Tārīkh-i ʿImād al-saʿādāt* (Lucknow, 1864), p. 137.

18 Anon., *Āʾīna-yi ḥaqq-numā*, fol. 67v; Rizvi, *Shīʿīs in India*, vol. II, p. 131; Cole, *The Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, p. 129.

19 Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shiʿite Islam* (London, 2002), pp. 79–82; Meir Litvak, "The finances of the ʿulamāʾ communities of Najaf and Karbala, 1796–1904', *Die Welt des Islams*, XL,1 (1999), pp. 46–49.

20 Rizvi, *Shīʿīs in India*, vol. II, pp. 139–146; Jaʿfar Ḥusayn, *Qadīm lakhnaw*, pp. 231–236.

21 On the Madrasa-yi Sulṭānīya, see Fāżil Nabīl Chawdhurī, "Sulṭānīya", *Khāndān-i Ijtihād* (Lucknow) X (October 2008), pp. 8–28. Shūshtarī's *Awrāq al-dhahab* (cited above in n. 6) is primarily a biography of Sulṭān al-ʿulamāʾ; cf. al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, pp.

(1793–1816) died relatively young in Lucknow. Sayyid Muhammad continued his quietist policy, for which his father had been criticised by Ahmad Bihbahani, refusing to sanction jihad in 1857, relying on the traditional Shiʿi position of the impermissibility of declaring jihad in the absence of the Hidden Imam. Two other sons travelled and studied extensively in Iraq: Sayyid Hasan (1791–1844) and Sayyid ʿAli (1786–1843), who lived in Karbala and was closely associated with the Shaikhi (hence heterodox Shiʿi) leader Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843) who gave him an *ijaza*.[22] On 19 Rajab 1235/2 May 1820, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli died, having declared his son Sayyid Muhammad, who became known as Sultan al-ʿulama, his successor and the leading *mujtahid* and religious functionary of the state.[23] Posthumously he became known as Ghufran-i ma'ab (the forgiven).

The role of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli in promoting a new Shiʿi theology should be viewed within the context of the relationship between the *ʿulama* and power in the new Awadh state. Lucknow was a major centre, built as a Shiʿi city under Asaf al-Dawla once the capital shifted in 1775 from Faizabad, with the new Bara Imambara, Asafiya mosque and other major monuments to inscribe the faith of the rulers on the public space.[24] The court, like the Safavid one before it, actively promoted popular Shiʿi practice, established institutions, *imambara*s and similar public buildings.[25] A key feature of popular Shiʿism was the crafting of a new literature of mourning for the martyrs of Karbala through *marsiya*s. Its centrality to poetry in the city was such that some have judged the Lucknow 'school' of Urdu literature to be inferior because of its excessive panegyrics and dirges, especially on religious topics, unbridled eroticism untempered by mystical love and the privileging of Arabic and Persian constructions and terminology over Hindi.[26] In this sense, some literary critics have considered the literature of Awadh to be artificial, reflecting the affected decadence of the nawabi court. The *marsiya* itself was

---

1082–83; al-Kāẓimī, *Aḥsan al-wadīʿa*, pp. 52–56. On Sayyid Ḥusayn, see al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 954; al-Kāẓimī, *Aḥsan al-wadīʿa*, pp. 56–58.

22 Cole, *The Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, pp. 186–187. On Sayyid Ḥasan, see al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 950, and on Sayyid ʿAlī, *Ibid.*, p. 940.

23 ʿAlī Fāżil, "Hiba-nāma va vaṣīyat-nāma-yi Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī", *Kitāb-i Shīʿa* I, 2 (1389 Sh/2010), pp. 153–154.

24 Umar, *Urban Culture in Northern India*, pp. 7–9.

25 Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, pp. 92–119; Surendra Mohan, *Awadh under the Nawabs: Politics, Culture, and Communal Relations 1722–1856* (New Delhi, 1997), pp. 79–89.

26 Umar, *Urban Culture in Northern India*, pp. 66–71; Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (London, 1964), pp. 117–144.

primarily a mode for the naturalisation of a Shiʿi poetical consciousness and the popularisation of its sentiment within an Awadhi context and cultural idiom – a process successfully patronised by the nawabs and produced by poets such as Mir Anis (d. 1874) and Mirza Dabir (d. 1875).[27]

Alongside the state's identity, its promotion of Shiʿi culture, within the market of ideas in North India, there was a need for a theology to bolster the ideology of the state as a vigorous Shiʿi kingdom. This was provided by Sayyid Dildar ʿAli. The core of this article's argument is that the promotion of a new Shiʿi theology had three elements: the first was the establishment of the rational method and an intra-Shiʿi championing of the Usuli method against Akhbari scripturalism; the second was a challenge to the power of Sufi shaikhs, both Sunni and Shiʿi, and a marginalisation of mystical speculation, especially monorealism, (*wahdat al-wujud*) among the Shiʿa; and the third was a rational and polemical defeat of Sunni theology. The last would emphasise the triumph of Shiʿi Islam in Awadh, displacing the ideology of the *qasba*s and the *shaikhzada*s – the latter included the deployment of the intellectual tools of the *dars-i nizami* against its progenitors in the Farangi Mahall. These were achieved through the production of texts, perpetuated and disseminated through presses and teaching circles, and by means of political influence and policy at court, especially through Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's scholarly network. His aim was to forge a distinctive Shiʿi identity in the service of the state.[28]

Establishing Usuli method and reason

A key element in establishing the Usuli rational tradition lay in attacking the *Akhbariya*, following the method of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's teachers in Iraq. Soon after his return to Lucknow, and probably before 1786, he wrote *Asas al-usul* [The foundation of jurisprudence], which was used later as a textbook by his sons at their seminary and had already been lithographed in Lucknow in 1848 by the Muḥammadiya press. The choice of Arabic as the medium of composition was significant – other works were written in Persian but Arabic was used to demonstrate his scholarly credentials, especially as he would

[27] Āzād, *Āb-e ḥayāt*, pp. 419–428; Sadiq, *Urdu Literature*, pp. 145–163; Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York, 2006), pp. 30–40; ʿAlī Jawād Zaidī, *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 159–169; *idem*, *Mir Anis* (New Delhi, 1986); Hilāl Naqvī, *Bīsvīṅ ṣadī awr jadīd marṡiya* (London/Karachi, 1994), pp. 33–90.

[28] Sayyid Bāqir Shams Lakhnawī, *Hindustān mēn shīʿat kī tārīkh aur Shīʿī ʿaqāʾid kī tafṣīl* (Lucknow, n.d.), pp. 14–23; Umar, *Islam in Northern India*, pp. 195–197.

usually send his works (as would his students) to the scholars in Iraq for their recognition. His fundamental goal was to delegitimise the Akhbaris' strict adherence solely to the text and to justify the use of reason in the derivation of law – hence to legitimise the process of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning).

In his introduction, Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali makes it clear that he wrote the work to establish the fundamental importance of reason as a divinely bestowed act of grace; it is *‘aql* [reason] that distinguishes humans, and its correct use obviates the possibility of being deceived and deluded.[29] This is entirely consistent with classical Shi‘i theology that privileges the innate faculty of reason as an act of grace and inner revelation provided by God to facilitate believers' ability to fulfil their moral obligations.[30] His interest lies in the use of reason for deriving law and the ethical precepts that ought to be followed in ritual practice and social transactions. This is because, as he says, the best intellectual inquiry after reflection upon the theology of the nature of divine unity is to understand the law and how to derive it since that truly is the 'best inheritance of the Prophet and the Imams'. He may have emphasised this in order to locate jurisprudence and legal theory at the heart of Shi‘i scholarly endeavour, particularly placing philosophy below it. This was significant given the dominance of philosophy in the *dars-i nizami* curriculum. He clarifies that he wrote the work because he had not been convinced by previous refutations of the *akhbariya*, especially Astarabadi's, of their manifesto *al-Fawa'id al-madaniya*[31] He criticises false accusations against scholars of the past, especially defending Ibn Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 1325), who was accused by Astarabadi of inventing legal theory in the Shi‘i context as a discipline borrowed from the Sunnis. Sayyid Dildar ‘Ali argues that the accusation is false: that, in fact, the Shi‘a had practiced rational inquiry in respect of the derivation of law much before the medieval period. In opposition to the Akhbari claim of a historical rupture between the tradition of the Imams and their companions and the later medieval Shi‘i tradition influenced by Sunni jurisprudence and Mu‘tazili theology, he argues for a rationalist continuity from the companions of the Imams through to his own teachers.[32] As ever, one discerns the invention of a tradition extending back to the age of the Imams as a means for establishing the authority of his rationalist agenda. Setting aside the naive hermeneutics of the Akhbariya, he

29 Sayyid Dildār ‘Alī, *Asās al-uṣūl* (Lucknow, 1848), pp. 2–3.

30 Martin McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut, 1978), pp. 57–69.

31 Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madanīya [wa-bi-dhaylihi al-Shawāhid al-Makkīya li-Nūr al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī]* (Qum, 2005).

32 Sayyid Dildār ‘Alī, *Asās al-uṣūl*, pp. 4–6.

insists on the necessity to evaluate critically the texts attributed to the Imams, especially in the light of the two key hermeneutical tools of legal theory, namely reason and juristic, scholarly consensus.

Following the Usuli method, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli divides the text into four sections (*maqasid*). The first two relate to the nature of the scripture, both the Qur'an and reports from the Prophet and Imams; and in what sense once one has investigated the probity and reliability of the text, especially in the case of *hadith*, one needs to investigate how that text can constitute a proof or a material cause for deriving a ruling. The second section is more extensive – the *hadith* are far more copious and significant for the formulation of the law than the rather restricted number of Qur'an verses that deal with such matters. The third section is on scholarly consensus, which was controversial since it was felt that consensus is rarely obtained. It was further problematic because it was a tool used by Sunnis to marginalise the Shiʿa and their adherence to the charismatic and absolute authority of the Imam. But perhaps the most important is the fourth section on the nature of the probative force (*ḥujjiya*) of reason alongside what the emerging tradition was calling the procedural instruments (*usul ʿamaliya*) such as precaution that were used by jurists to provide guidance for believers in the absence of clear textual proofs and established legal precepts. This section is divided into six chapters (*fusul*). The first relates to a key theological premise: that both the moral good and the moral evil are accessible to rational discernment independently of revelation (*al-husn wa-l-qubh ʿaqliyan*).[33] Just as humans arrive at a recognition of the existence of God and the moral obligation that it entails through reason, so too can they broadly understand, rationally, in the absence of scriptural *diktat*, fundamental issues of moral goods and evils. This was significant, not only because the Akhbaris disputed the position but also because the Farangi Mahall scholars, on account of their adherence to Maturidi theology as evinced in the *Musallam al-thubut* of Muhibbullah Bihari (d. 1707) and its commentary by Bahr al-ʿUlum, criticised the unfettered use of reason as an independent moral compass, targeting the Shiʿa.[34] On the basis of rational discernment, the next chapter provides the procedure for establishing the prohibition or compulsion of an act based purely on reason. This is followed by a theological consideration of the status of acts before revelation came – a key rational problem indicating that revelation is not necessary to establish whether an act is permissible or prohibited. Attached to this is a discussion of the basic permissibility of acts in the absence of a prohibition (*asalat al-*

[33] *Ibid*., pp. 154–162.

[34] Muḥibbullāh Bihārī, *Musallam al-thubūt* (Cairo, 1904), pp. 25ff.

ibaha).[35] The fourth chapter is on the rational principle of the presumption of the *status quo ante* (*al-istishab*): unless one has positive proof to the contrary, one assumes that a previous state still obtains – the classic example is the state of ritual purity such that as long as one is not aware of a cause of the loss of the purity, one assumes that it persists. The penultimate chapter looks at forms of argumentation, on legal syllogistics. The final chapter considers the problem of potential confusion between different rationally derived positions and the recommendation of precaution (*al-ihtiyat*). The text demonstrates his skill as a trained jurist, capable of formulating rational arguments in defence of his positions.

The extensive nature of the rational argumentation and the formulation of a clearly laid out set of principles makes *Asas al-usul* suitable as a school text, which one suspects was certainly part of Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's intention. In fact, one can discern in each of his theological endeavours an attempt to establish his own particular contribution through the production of a text that could be perpetuated in a pedagogical setting. Alongside the text, Usuli rationalism was promoted through a serious of shorter texts in Persian that he wrote either as collections of *responsa* and through his sermons from the Friday pulpit, the first set of which, *Fawa'id-i Asafiyya*, were based on the first year of official Friday congregational prayers in Lucknow in 1200/1786. The establishment of Friday prayers, further defended in a *Risala-yi jum'a*, provided a pulpit for the dissemination of official religious doctrine, and especially a vehicle for promoting his own authority and providing a platform for criticising and marginalising his rivals at court. Other institutions used to promote this element of the new theology were official appointments of Shi'i jurists to the judiciary, the imposition of Shi'i systems of taxation and the development of informal circles of learning around him into the official Madrasa-yi Sultaniya under his son Sayyid Muhammad.

Attack on Sufism

The second element of the new theology was the attack on Sufism, on the ideas of Sufi metaphysics and the authority of Sufi *shaikh*s among the nobility of Awadh. Sufis had been recipients of court patronage and constituted a clear threat to claims of clerical authority articulated by the Usulis and required both a political and an intellectual response. Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's main work in this endeavour was *Al-Shihab al-thaqib* [The lightening strike],

35 Sayyid Dildār 'Alī, *Asās al-uṣūl*, pp. 162–190.

again written in Arabic for scholars and dedicated to his patron Sarfaraz al-Dawla Hasan Riza Khan. The text begins with an eloquent proemium in rhyming prose (*saj'*) to demonstrate his ability in Arabic. He laments the fact that people are turning to Sufi shaikhs, away from the teachings of the Prophet and his successors who are the true authorities and proofs of God. To this end, he cites two themes of anti-Sufi writing well attested in Safavid works. First, the Caliphs in early Islam had promoted Sufis and philosophers to turn people away from the family of the Prophet. He cites the example of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833) who tried to humiliate the eighth Shi'i Imam 'Ali al-Rida (d. 818) by setting up disputations with theologians and philosophers, using "heresy" to create discord and strife and distract people from the Imams.[36] Sufism was thus a conspiracy to destroy Shi'ism. Second, the Imams themselves had condemned Sufis as "representatives of Satan", and had condemned philosophers as corruptors of the people. The very survival of Shi'ism was only due to the diligence and courage of the "true *'ulama*" who had opposed Sufis and philosophers and "made their heresy and unbelief" clear to the community. It is the scholars who had, and have, the authority to condemn heresy and provide guidance for the people.[37] Since the *'ulama* are arbiters of the true faith, they have the authority and obligation to fight against heresy. It is therefore clear that Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's argument is concerned with bolstering his own authority, and that of his class of jurists opposed to Sufism. In the Safavid period, with the work in particular of Mulla Tahir Qummi (d. 1098/1688), one discerns this connection between the illegitimacy of Sufism and philosophy, especially because the latter entails an acceptance of the doctrine of being espoused by the former – and this is clear in *al-Fawa'id al-diniya* [Religious Arguments] and *Hikmat al-'arifin* [Philosophy of the mystics].[38] In these texts, the doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) espoused by the Sunni Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) is condemned in particular – and it is instructive that Sayyid Dildar 'Ali spends most of his time delegitimising this doctrine after a careful reformulation of it.

Al-Shihab al-thaqib is divided into four sections and a conclusion. The first section, comprising eight chapters, examines the doctrine of being as expressed by Sufis, philosophers and theologians and is a rational consideration of their

36 Sayyid Dildār 'Alī, *al-Shihāb al-thāqib* (MS British Library, Delhi Arabic 909), fol. 2v–3r.

37 *Ibid.*, fol. 3v–4v.

38 Rasūl Ja'farīyān, *Siyāsat va farhang-i rūzgār-i ṣafavī* (Tehran, 1388 Sh/2009), pp. 678–680, 797–805. For Qummī's texts, I have consulted the following manuscripts: *al-Fawā'id al-dīnīya* (MS Tehran Majlis-i Shūrā 3479), and *Ḥikmat al-'ārifin* (MS Tehran Majlis-i Shūrā 4013).

argument, designed to show that the Sufi position on the unity of being, that all that exists is a singular reality whose referent is ultimately God, is not only intellectually indefensible and demonstrably false (in the standard Aristotelian sense of proof) but also confused. The second section, divided into six chapters, examines the scriptural texts adduced by Sufis, including Shiʿi Sufis like Sayyid Haidar Amuli (d. 1385), whose ideas and works were popular in India, in favour of the doctrine of the unity of being. Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's strategy here is not only to draw into question the reliability and probity of these texts, which in many cases of sayings attributed to the Prophet and the Imams are questionable in their 'authenticity' but also to raise the hermeneutical problem of how one ought to read and make sense of them. Where the texts are indisputable, such as Qur'anic verses and some of the *hadith*, the argument that draws upon them to prove unity of being is disputed and disproved. The third section then moves onto claims made by Sufis. It is divided into two parts. The first disputes the validity of claims of inner revelation: Sufis claimed that they understood reality and could even verify texts through some process of inspiration or even revelation known as *kashf*. Deconstructing the notion of *kashf* and the claims and statements of famous (Sunni) Sufis of the past is an important element of his method in this section. Secondly, it could be taken as an indirect critique of Akhbari methodology since their thinkers, such as Shaikh Yusuf al-Bahrani (d. 1772), claimed to use *kashf* to verify the authenticity of sayings of the Prophet and the Imams. Part of the critique of *kashf* relates to the implication that it suggests a shortcoming on the part of the Prophet and the Imams – surely, as representatives of God, they should have informed their community of the truth of things. Their inability to do so is therefore shown up by the claims of Sufis to "know better". The second part of this section relates to the "innovations of Sufis", their embrace of music and dance as ritual practice – an important established theme of Safavid anti-Sufi texts – and their socially transgressive promotion of libertinism.[39] A common feature of heretication, clearly manifest in anti-Sufi texts as early as the medieval period, is the accusation of sexual licentiousness. The final aspect of this section relates to the "numerous sects'" among Sufis. Consistent with heresiographical method, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's enumeration of the sects among Sufis – he draws upon earlier texts such as *Hadiqat al-Shiʿa* [Garden of the Shiʿa] from the middle of the seventeenth century – is designed to show that if these people were so correct about their vision of reality, why did they disagree so much among

[39] On the music and dancing theme, see Jaʿfarīyān, *Siyāsat va farhang-i rūzgār-i ṣafavī*, pp. 931–955.

themselves?[40] The fourth section is an attempt to respond to calumnies projected by Sufis against the jurists and an attempt at refuting them.

Divided into six chapters, the conclusion makes it clear why Sayyid Dildar ʿAli believes it necessary to write a condemnation of Sufism. First, he has a duty to enjoin good and forbid evil (an important obligation in Shiʿi theology) and as he sees Sufism as an evil, he is obliged to warn people. Second, he has a duty to warn people to steer clear of gatherings of innovation (*bidʿa*): the social popularity of Sufi practice in the towns of Awadh necessitates this warning. Third, since it is prohibited to follow the enemies of the faith – and here he means Sunni Sufis, who distract people from following the Imams and their representatives the Shiʿi jurists - he must warn them of this prohibition. Fourth, it is permissible, and indeed required, to curse innovators – and Sufis, as the texts cited by him from the Imams make clear, are innovators. Fifth, belief in the unity of being is clear heresy and must be proclaimed as such. Finally, as a jurist with a theological and moral obligation, he must call people to repent – once people are convinced of the evil of Sufi ideas and practices, they can repent and return to the fold of the faith. He follows up this text with a Persian version that is shorter entitled *Risala-yi radd-i mazhab-i sufiya* [Refutation of the religion of the Sufis]. While there is much in it that follows earlier Safavid patterns, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli makes his own contributions, especially in his exposition of the philosophy of being in the first section, demonstrating his skill in the tradition of Mulla Sadra (d. 1635), on whose *Sharh al-hidaya* [Commentary on the guidance], the main philosophical text of the *dars-i nizami*, he wrote a *marginalia*.

What is remarkable about this anti-Sufism is its condemnation of the doctrine of the unity of being. While this focus is clear in Safavid sources, there are also particular reasons for this, deriving from his context. First, we know that the school of Ibn ʿArabi and the doctrine of the unity of being was the dominant idea of Awadh Sufis, both among the Chishtiya and others, including major figures who were associated with the court.[41] Shah ʿAli Akbar

40 For an excellent study of Sufism and anti-Sufism in the Safavid period that provides the background for these Indian discussions, see Ata Anzali, *Safavid Shiʿism, the Eclipse of Sufism, and the Emergence of ʿIrfān* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Rice University, 2012).

41 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi, 1992), vol. II, pp. 36ff; Roderic Vassie, "ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī and the Bhagavadgita", in *The Heritage of Sufism* II, (ed.) L. Lewisohn (Oxford, 1999), pp. 367–378; William Chittick, "Notes on Ibn ʿArabī's influence in the subcontinent", *Muslim World*, LXXXII (1992), pp. 218–241; G.A. Lipton, *Muḥibb Allāh Ilāhābādī's The Equivalence between Giving and Receiving: Avicennan Neoplatonism and the School of Ibn ʿArabī in South Asia* (unpublished MA dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2007).

Husaini Mawdudi Chishti of Faizabad (d. 1210/1795), who led his own Friday prayers (at a shrine in Ayodhya) that were frequented by Shiʿa and patronised by the vizier Sayyid Hasan Riza Khan and Shah Khairullah Naqshbandi, was one such prominent individual.[42] Mawdudi was a descendent of the founder of the Chishti order, a *sayyid* and known to have *tafzili* views (preferring ʿAli over Abu Bakr on the issue of succession to the Prophet). Hence, he was seen as a philo-Shiʿi, and a proponent not only of the use of devotional music but also an ardent defender of the monism of Ibn ʿArabi. He was an influential person at court. Implicitly the attack was on the Shah Wali Allah tradition, associated with the major theological figure of Delhi whose influence extended to Awadh and who was also known to have penned anti-Shiʿi polemics.[43] An attack on the unity of being was, therefore, intended to discredit and delegimitise such claims to religious authority. Second, the doctrine of the unity of being was popular among the Sunni *ʿulama* of Farangi Mahall who had traditionally provided the services of scholarship and justice for the Awadh state, and was therefore an attack on their legitimacy. Precursors of this are clear in the biographical sources that claim Sayyid Dildar ʿAli bettering both ʿAbd ʿAli Bahr al-ʿulum and Mulla Hasan in debate. Third, anti-Sufism was a major theme in the thought of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's teachers in Iraq – indeed, the son of Bihbahani wrote perhaps the major Persian anti-Sufi polemic of the period, the *Risala-yi khayratiya*.[44] Finally, the position on unity of being was also an attempt to enhance his own theological method since it was a doctrine that was already popular among Shiʿi scholars both in Iran and India. As such, he was drawing a line under the Safavid tradition that was open to such speculative metaphysics and mysticism and, instead, trying to return to a more pristine Shiʿi theology – as we shall see in his other major theological work, *ʿImad al-Islam*.

A New Theology

The third element of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's strategy was the writing of *Mir'at al-ʿuqul fi ʿilm al-usul* to challenge the theology of the Sunni rationalists of Awadh. He took Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210) as his main target because of the latter's centrality to scholars in India through his most important work,

[42] Al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, pp. 1042–43; Muḥammad Najm al-Ghanī, *Tārīkh-i Awadh* (Lucknow, 1919), vol. III, pp. 132–133; cf. Umar, *Islam in Northern India*, p. 196.

[43] Rizvi, *Shāh Walī-Allāh*, pp. 256–277.

[44] Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī, *Risāla-yi khayrātīya dar ibṭāl-i ṭarīqa-yi ṣūfiya*, (ed.) Mahdī Rajā'ī (Qum, 1371 Sh/1992).

Nihayat al-ʿuqul [The pinnacle of the intellects]. The text covered five large volumes, one each on the theological divisions of the nature of God, his unity and attributes (*al-tawhid*); divine justice (*al-ʿadl*); prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*); Imamate (*al-imama*) and the resurrection and the afterlife (*al-maʿad*), and was copied extensively and lithographed in Lucknow consistently from the middle of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century.

In the introduction to the first volume, Sayyid Dildar ʿAli clarifies his intention for writing the work: it provides a solid, rational basis for the faith, insisting upon the need for a reflective, reasoned approach to understanding God, humanity and the cosmos, and indicating what the acknowledgement of an existence of a wise and just God entails for believers.[45] He claims that particularly in India, but also beyond, there is a need for a book that "contains clear and eloquent proofs that guide people, that presents realities (*haqa'iq*) and subtle arguments (*daqa'iq*) so that the views of opponents both recent and from the past are easily defeated".[46] He signals his targeting of the "Imam of the ʿAsharites" Fakhr al-Din Muhammad b. ʿUmar al-Razi when he cites from his *Nihayat al-ʿuqul* the three reasons why any work is outstanding. Razi says that these features are: deep and careful consideration of the views of others through access and examination of their works first hand; the derivation of proper apodictic proofs that yield true knowledge and certainty; and a wonderful and useful arrangement of the arguments and content so that one cannot just stick with the surface readings but must pay attention to detail. Sayyid Dildar ʿAli claims to go one better – he does all this and more through a deep meditation on the words of the Imams, eschewing all bigotry to provide independent positions and not just defend school doctrine, and by giving serious consideration to rational and scriptural proofs. These are important characteristics of the work that one can discern through the five volumes. He faithfully reproduces Razi's arguments and criticises them through adducing evidence from scriptural proofs and formulating rational responses. He takes independent positions, and often cites much earlier authorities such as the Baghdadi theologians al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022) and al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), thereby bypassing much medieval Shiʿi theology that was formulated by Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274) and Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 1325). His polemical strategy is to reconstruct any early theological method that seems to be both rational and scriptural in

---

45 Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Mir'āt al-ʿuqūl fī ʿilm al-uṣūl*, (ed.) Sayyid Āqā Ḥasan (Lucknow, 1902), vol. I, pp. 1–3.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

opposition to what he might consider to be the excessively philosophical and theoretical approach of the medieval school of Hilla.

Once again written in Arabic, the primary aim of the text is to establish the author's scholarly credentials and to pursue the quest for independent positions to demonstrate his mastery of the tradition. The first two volumes make this quite clear. The theological traditions in Islam from the medieval period, especially as debated in the cycle of texts initiated by *Tajrid al-i'tiqad* [The sublimation of belief] written by Nasir al-Din Tusi, and in the treatises on the proof for the existence of God (*ithbat al-bari'*) inspired by Avicenna's famous proof from contingency, tended to focus in extensive and minute detail on the examination of the nature of God's existence, his attributes, the nature of his knowledge and what that entailed for the possibility of human free will. The preliminaries to volume one follow this theological tradition by focusing on epistemology, in particular the process of reflection and the need to acquire an understanding and knowledge of what God is, and a discussion of ontology, the very nature of being. However, while he demonstrates his understanding of the theological and philosophical traditions, his main authorities are actually a collection of sayings attributed to the Imams al-Sadiq and al-Rida and the theological treatises of al-Shaykh al-Mufid, as well as some of the disputations of the companions of the Imams.[47] He approves of a prohibition on the more speculative tendencies in philosophical theology.[48]

He distances himself from the Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy, citing with approval Avicenna's critique of both the reality of Platonic forms as well as the so-called identity thesis, namely that knowledge is a process of union between the human intellect and the transcendent active intellect, an epistemic union that often is used to symbolise the mystical union of the seeker to God.[49] Thus, because the identity thesis is associated with monism, it is set aside. He cites the traditional critique of the philosophers for their denial of a volitional creator and their espousal of a mechanistic first principle.[50] His anti-monism thus allows for a greater embrace of Avicennism against the school of Mulla Sadra, whom he cites but not always with approval. His rational concern is particularly with Shi'i doctrines such as *al-bada'* (the notion that humans perceive God to be changing his decrees with respect to certain events), on which he ignores the medieval discussions and reverts back to both scripture and early theological positions, the rational nominalism of

[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 16–36.
[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.
[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 90–98.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 177–179.

the divine attributes, and the denial of ocular vision of God in the afterlife.[51] Arguably, the whole of the second volume is on Shiʿi specificity with the emphasis on divine justice, although much of the discussion concerns the medieval debate on divine will and whether that is compatible with human free will.[52]

Much of the text avoids the citation of contemporaries, something that might suggest that he did not feel that any of the scholars of his time were worth debating. However, he does cite the medieval tradition liberally, and in the fifth volume on eschatology he engages extensively with a figure whose works were very important in the *dars-i nizami*, Mahmud Jaunpuri (d. 1654).[53] In many ways, this is the most philosophically sophisticated volume, although once again, surprisingly, he fails to mentions some of the most important and controversial theories on the resurrection associated with Mulla Sadra. The volume culminates with a section on the importance of the Imams as those who usher in the eschaton – messianism that is central to Shiʿi theology is given a central eschatological role.[54]

Much of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's work is thus quite innovative and serious. It does present a number of independent positions that are decidedly novel. He deliberately sets out to criticise the rational foundation of the philosophical theology of his intellectual rivals, the Sunni theologians in the towns in Awadh but also distances himself from the philosophical theology of the school of Mulla Sadra that had strong roots in India. But his intention is not just to present a new positive theology; it is designed to further a polemical rejection of the others, and thus complements his other writings in defence of the faith.

This latter theme relates to his engagement in polemics when responding to anti-Shiʿi works. Shah ʿAbd al-ʿAziz's *Tuhfa-yi isnaʿashariya* was arguably the most important anti-Shiʿi polemic of the precolonial period, and it spawned an extensive literature in support, in refutation and counter-refutation.[55] It was completed in 1204/1789-1790 in response to the fear of rising Shiʿi power and influence in North India. In his preface, Shah ʿAbd al-ʿAziz set out the reasons for writing the text:

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 110–150, 223–264.

[52] Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Mir'āt al-ʿuqūl*, vol. II (MS British Library, Delhi Arabic 920), fol. 67r–121r.

[53] Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Mir'āt al-ʿuqūl*, vol. V (MS British Library, Delhi Arabic 923), fol. 21r onwards.

[54] *Ibid.*, fol. 200r–396r.

[55] Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihād* (Canberra, 1982), pp. 260–355.

> In this treatise, we have gathered together the fruits of disputation that the Shiʿa have had with the *ahl-i sunnat* over the ages. . .In the place and time in which we live, the popularity and prevalence of Shiʿism has attained such a magnitude that there is hardly a house in which we do not find one or two men who have not embraced the Shiʿi faith or are not inclined to it. But most of them are ignorant and illiterate; nor are they acquainted with their ancestral faith. When the Shiʿa initiate discussions in the assemblies of Sunnis, they speak irreverently and incoherently. It was under these circumstances that this book was written with the view that at the time of disputation, the Sunnis should not deviate from the right path, and should not reject the principles of their faith. They should not allow doubts and suspicions to occur regarding some important issues.[56]

The text was appropriately divided into twelve chapters: the first was on the appearance of the Shiʿi religion, repeating the old trope of anti-Shiʿi polemics that argued for a Jewish (and hence un-Islamic) origin for it through the semi-legendary figure of ʿAbdullah b. Saba'.[57] He claimed that the Shiʿa have lied, changed, split and divided, confused and betrayed the Sunni mainstream and generally undermined the world of Islam, but most importantly since the rise of the Turkmen and the Safavids at the end of the fifteenth century, they have now politically dominated the Islamic East. The function of this first chapter is thus to establish why the Shiʿa are a threat who should be opposed. An important element of the process of the text, and this is consistent with Naqshbandi approaches to anti-Shiʿi polemics, was to insist that the *ahl al-bayt* had nothing to do with the Shiʿa but were very much part of the Sunni tradition, and, second, to focus on the accusations and cursing of key companions of the Prophet as a sign of unbelief among the Shiʿa. The second chapter attempts to undercover the Satanic ruses (*maka'id*) of the Shiʿa whereby they attract, confuse and mislead believers, especially targeting elites.[58] The third chapter on the ancestors of the Shiʿa identified seven sects, all stemming from Ibn Saba', and perpetuates the common

[56] Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tūhfa-yi is̱nāʿasharīya* (rpt., Istanbul, 1994), pp. 3–4. Cf. Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, p. 256; Umar, *Islam in Northern India*, pp. 215–216.

[57] Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi isnāʿasharīya*, pp. 5–62; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 261–269. For a famous Shiʿi polemic claiming Ibn Sabā' was merely a legendary figure, see Sayyid Murtaḍā, *ʿAbdullāh bin Sabā'* (Najaf, 1956); for a recent scholarly assessment, debunking the black myth but arguing for the historicity of the figure, see Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Sabā' and the Origins of Shiʿism* (Leiden, 2011).

[58] Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tūhfa-yi is̱nāʿasharīya*, pp. 62–199; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 269–280.

slander of sexual impropriety and licentiousness inherent in the Shiʿa gene.[59] The fourth chapter is an examination of Shiʿi *ḥadīth* and narrations in order to demonstrate their technical and actual weaknesses and contradictions in order to undermine the hermeneutics of Shiʿi polemical positions.[60] The fifth chapter turns to theology on the nature of God and critiques Shiʿi views on the rational recognition of God, the beatific vision and free will and broadly defends Ashʿari views.[61] The sixth chapter on prophecy critiques 16 doctrines on infallibility, the incumbency of prophecy on God and the relationship between prophets and imams.[62] The seventh chapter is on the imamate, a detailed examination of the scriptural evidence used by Shiʿi polemicists; it includes an important defence of the Sunni case for the succession of Abu Bakr as it deflects the views of those who were not Shiʿi but considered ʿAli to be superior and the rightful successor (a position known as *tafzil*).[63] The eighth chapter examines views on eschatology.[64] The ninth moves onto particular precepts in Shiʿi law, but actually focuses on the practice of cursing companions of the Prophet and on the inauguration of festivals.[65] The tenth deals with a long list of Shiʿi accusations (*mataʿin*) against the early caliphs and companions, especially Abu Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthman, and ʿA'isha.[66] The eleventh chapter is on the peculiarities of Shiʿism, such as their myths, their bigotry and so forth.[67] The final chapter is on the Shiʿi principles of *tawalla*' and *tabarra*' - cleaving to the family of the Prophet and dissociating from and cursing those considered to be their enemies.[68]

59 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 199–231; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 280–282.

60 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 231–276; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 282–286.

61 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 276–314; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 286–290.

62 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfyi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 314–348; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 290–293.

63 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 348–473; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 293–304.

64 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 473–493; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, p. 304.

65 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 493–529; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 304–305.

66 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 529–699; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 305–337.

67 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 699–779; Rizvi, Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, pp. 337–352.

68 Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, *Tuḥfa-yi is̲nāʿasharīya*, pp. 779–810; Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 352–355.

The *Tuhfa* had a number of prominent responses, which were solicited and commissioned.[69] Sayyid Dildar ʿAli and his students wrote some of the more famous ones. *Sawarim-i ilahiya* [Divine thunderbolts] critiqued the metaphysics of the text in Chapter 5; *Husam al-Islam* [The sword of Islam] addressed prophecy in Chapter 6; *Khatima-yi Sawarim* was concerned with chapter 7 on the imamate; *Risala-yi ghaybat* on the twelfth Imam; *Ihya'-yi sunnat* [Revival of the prophetic practice) attacked the section on eschatology (*maʿad*) in Chapter 8; and *Risala-yi Dhu-l-fiqār* was about Chapter 12 on tabarra and *walaya*. His strategy is to accuse Shah ʿAbd al-ʿAziz of deliberately confusing Shiʿi positions and to focus upon the problems within the Sunni tradition between the Ashaʿira and the Maturidiya on key theological issues. He strongly, as is consonant with his other works, insists upon the centrality of reason as a standard in argumentation and the formulation of doctrine.[70] He consistently focuses upon Fakhr al-Din al-Razi as representative of the Ashʿari tradition and criticises him, referring often to the more complete accounts in his magnum opus *ʿImad al-Islam*.[71] Similarly, he uses the opportunity to attack Sufis and their doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*), which he also does in his *al-Shihab al-thaqib*.[72] His sons and other students took up the challenge of refuting other chapters in the *Tuhfa*.

Conclusion

Although Sayyid Dildar ʿAli was a central figure, it took time for the institutions and practices of the Awadh state to become exclusively Shiʿi – the judiciary being a major case in point. There were insufficient judges trained in Shiʿi law, and the founding of a seminary to train them came after his death.[73] His scholarly endeavours were extensive and did amount to a new conception of Shiʿi theology, a vibrant but polemical bolster for the new realities of North India in a post-Mughal context. His works attacked

---

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 356–470. The most extensive refutation of the *Tuḥfa* was *Nuzhat-i is̱nāʿasharīya* by Ḥakīm Mīrzā Muḥammad Kāmil Kashmīrī (d. 1235/1819–1820), known as the Fourth Martyr (*shahīd-i rābiʿ*) – see Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Kashmīrī, *Takmila-yi Nujūm al-samā'* (Qum, 1978), vol. II, p. 422; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-intellectual History of the Isnāʿasharī Shīʿīs in India* (Canberra, 1986), vol. II, pp. 96–97.

70 Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Ṣawārim-i ilāhīyāt* (Calcutta, 1218/1804), pp. 180–187; cf. Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, pp. 388–389.

71 Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Ṣawārim-i ilāhīyāt*, pp. 237–241; idem, *Ḥusām al-Islām* (Calcutta, 1218/1804), p. 405; cf. Rizvi, *Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, p. 391.

72 Sayyid Dildār ʿAlī, *Ṣawārim-i ilāhīyāt*, p. 97; idem, *Ḥusām al-islām*, pp. 11–14.

73 Cole, *The Roots of North Indian Shīʿism*, pp. 204–209.

classical opponents and concepts taken generally, but his interlocutors and contemporary readers could discern in the arguments attacks on his Sunni, Sufi, and Akhbari contemporaries. However, his conception of what it meant to be Shiʿi was not uncontested. Taking the three strands discussed above, each one was challenged. With regard to the Usuli case, Akhbaris did not just die out in North India. Mirza Muhammad Akhbari (d. 1817) was well received at court and he wrote a refutation of Dildar ʿAli.[74] Akhbaris also defended their positions and wrote refutations of *Asas al-usul*. One anonymous and contemporary refutation, dedicated to Nawwab Saʿadat ʿAli Khan, argues that, first, the faith is not based on reason as an independent standard but upon the understanding of the Qur'an that derives from the explanations (*bayan*) of the Imams, and, second, that neither law nor theology can be based upon probability and conjecture (*zann*).[75] In support of his position, this unnamed critic cites a long list of Shiʿi Akhbari *ʿulama* and even brings the famous Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699) to his cause, arguing that he denied that independent rational proofs were part of the Shiʿi tradition.[76] The fact that Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's sons and students continued to write against Akhbaris suggests that the case was never won, even if their discourse had become dominant. Insofar as the debate with Akhbaris was as much about clerical authority, it remains a feature of contemporary Shiʿism in South Asia.

Sufis also failed to disappear. Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's rival for the patronage of Hasan Riza Khan, Shah ʿAli Akbar Mawdudi, continued to have a following and wrote an important Sufi treatise defending the practices of music, the hermeneutics of *kashf* and the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*.[77] Another anonymous text written by a Shiʿi Sufi at the time of Saʿadat ʿAli Khan responds to *al-Shihab al-thaqib*. Drawing upon the work of the famous "Third Martyr" Sayyid Nurullah Shushtari (d. 1610), it argues that Sufism and Shiʿism are identical because they have common roots in the person and

---

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 163–165; cf. al-Lakhnawī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, p. 1085. Akhbārī's work is called *Maʿāwil al-ʿuqūl li-qilaʿ Asās al-uṣūl* [Intellectual arguments to destroy the foundations of jurisprudence] and mentioned in the famous bio-bibliography of Shiʿi texts, *al-Dharīʿa ilā taṣānīf al-shīʿa* of Āqā Buzurg Ṭihrānī (Volume 2, no.7). Some of Dildār ʿAlī's students responded with works such as *Muṭāriq al-ḥaqq wa-l-yaqīn li-kasr muʿāwil al-shayāṭīn* [Pathways of truth and certainty destroying the satanic arguments].

75 Anon., *al-Radd al-qaṣī ʿalā Dildār ʿAlī*, (MS British Library, Delhi Arabic 967), fol. 294v–298r. Further examination of this text alongside the Akhbārī text of *Maʿāwil al-ʿuqul* may prove them to be the same.

76 *Ibid.*, fol. 298v–307v.

77 ʿAlī Akbar b. Mīrzā Asad al-Dīn Sirāj al-Ḥaqq Mawdūdī, *al-Fawāʾid al-Mawdūdīya*, MS British Library Delhi Persian 953, fol. 92v–131v.

the teachings of the Imams of the family of the Prophet.[78] It then provides a long list of great Shiʿi *ʿulama* sympathetic to Sufism, as well as defending their attachment to *kashf* and esoteric knowledge as an inheritance from the Imams. The text staunchly defends, in rather *ad hominem* terms, the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* and questions Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's scholarly credentials.[79] It is clear from the text that its author considers *al-Shihab* and its arguments to be derivative, based on the Safavid works of Mulla Tahir Qummi – and since the elder Muhammad Taqi Majlisi had responded to him, he feels that a proper refutation is unnecessary.[80] He finishes with the issue of music and dance, strongly supporting the practices.[81] The popularity of Sufi practice and devotion in North India remained even among the Shiʿa.

The *kalam* works similarly did not go unchallenged. Although the dominance of the "family of ijtihad" was clear, some independent-minded authors did write critically. One such figure was Sayyid Murtaza Nawnehravi (d. 1336/1918) who, in his *Miʿraj al-ʿuqul fi sharh duʿaʾ al-mashlul* in the early twentieth century, continued the project of criticising Razi, but also condemned many of Sayyid Dildar ʿAli's positions but defended the philosophical theology of the school of Mulla Sadra.[82]

However, despite these responses, the theology that Sayyid Dildar ʿAli formulated and promoted with its anti-Sunnism, anti-Akhbarism, and anti-Sufism, coupled with a critique of philosophy, remains a formidable force in modern South Asia. Any serious consideration of the modern intellectual history of Shiʿi Islam in the subcontinent must engage in a serious re-evaluation of not just the nature of theology at the cusp of the new Awadh dispensation but also what changed in the Awadh state. Consistent with the project of understanding the intellectual history of South Asia as a way of deciding what changed in the period of colonialism, any understanding of Shiʿism under British rule and in the post-colonial period needs to engage more rigorously with what came before, what changed and what established the parameters and issues of debate that continue to affect intellectual and cultural trends today. s.h.rizvi@exeter.ac.uk

78 Anon., *Radd-i Shihāb-i thāqib*, MS British Library Delhi Persian 1190, fol. 171v–172r.

79 *Ibid.*, fol. 180r–184r.

80 *Ibid.*, fol. 174v–178r.

81 *Ibid.*, fol. 187v.

82 This text, of which only the initial volume appeared, was originally lithographed and published by the Nāṣirī Press in Jaunpur in 1913. A new typeset edition is being prepared by Mahdī Khāja-pīrī and will be published by the Iran Cultural Centre in New Delhi with an introduction by Akbar S̱ubūt. On Nawnehravī, see Nawgānvī, *Taẕkira-yi Bē bahā*, p. 381.

2 The Isma'ili – Isna 'Ashari Divide Among the Khojas
Exploring Forgotten Judicial Data from Karachi

Michel Boivin

The impact of British colonialism on the society of Bombay has been addressed by many scholars. Recently, Nile Green has explored the city's Muslim communities to show how religious leaders were prominent among those who profited from the modernisation implemented by the British.[1] However Karachi, despite its status as Bombay's twin city in terms of close political links and parallel economic growth in the nineteenth century, has received much less academic attention than Bombay.[2] Nevertheless, the two cities share important similarities, as well as disparities. In both cases, their economy was controlled by a number of castes: Parsi, Hindu as well as Muslim. These merchant groups, as the vanguard of economic growth, were among the first to deal with the major changes associated with colonial-era transformation.

This article addresses the evolution of one of these groups, the Khojas, at the turn of the twentieth century. It examines the extent to which the challenges introduced by British colonial rule compelled the Khojas, a community resident in both Bombay and Karachi, to reshape their social and religious structures. The Khojas comprised a cluster of castes, mainly established in Sindh and Gujarat, which were dominated by trader groups. In each locality, the main families of the community were represented on a

1 Nile Green, *Bombay Islam*: *The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011).

2 This does not mean that no academic papers have been published on this topic; rather, no thorough study has been devoted to the impressive transformation of Karachi in the second half of the nineteenth century that led to it being described as the "Pearl of the East". Hamida Khuhro and Anwer Mooraj, *Karachi Megacity of Our Times* (Karachi, 1997), p. 29.

panchayat (working council), issuing rules and regulations on community matters. Nevertheless, Khoja castes were rather open, since as a community they could incorporate low castes, and even outcastes, in cases where these could reinforce their economic network. However, Khojas consisted of atomised small communities independent from one another. It is certainly quite difficult to link them to a systematic, institutionalised religion. Instead, as was quite common in north-west India, Khojas could be the followers of a number of different *pirs* and *gurus*, both Muslim and Hindu. Among their religious guides were Muslim *pirs* who were the deputies of the Isma'ili leader of Iranian origin, Hasan 'Ali Shah (1800–1881), later known as Aga Khan I.

During the nineteenth century, a number of cases were filed in government courts, including the watershed Aga Khan Case of 1866. During this major case in the Bombay High Court, it was decided that Khojas were the followers of the Aga Khan, and consequently that they were Isma'ili Shi'i Muslims, with the Aga Khan the sole owner of all community properties. However, while this case has already been addressed by a number of scholars,[3] this article will turn from the Khojas of Bombay to those of Karachi: for while the judicial sources relating to the former have been explored at length, those of Karachi have been relatively neglected. By using new judicial sources from Karachi, this article argues that the resistance demonstrated by Khojas there, was an expression of their caste as an independent social body. Indeed, their conversion as a community to Isna 'Ashari Shi'ism resulted from their refusal to be dominated in their social and religious affairs by the Aga Khan.

Accordingly, this article will focus on two main topics. First, it provides a detailed analysis of how this dispute began, highlighting the fact that the Karachi dissent was not an imitation of, nor something that followed on from, dissent in Bombay. The second issue relates to the underlying forces that were involved in shifting the Khojas from Isma'ilism to Isna 'Ashari Shi'ism. While previous studies have mainly considered the issue of religious identity, this article will show that their separation into two distinct communities, the Isma'ilis and the Isna 'Asharis,[4] can mainly be understood in terms of social

---

[3] See, for example, J. C. Masselos, "The Khojas of Bombay: the defining of formal membership criteria during the nineteenth century", in *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India*, (ed.) Imtiaz Ahmad (New Delhi, 1973); Amrita Shodan, *A Question of Community: Religious Groups and Colonial Law* (Calcutta, 2001); and Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case. Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Harvard, 2012).

[4] In Bombay, the dissent included the birth of a Sunni community among the Khojas. This is not stated to have happened in Karachi and Sindh. The present-day Sunni Khoja community of Karachi migrated from Bombay after partition in 1947.

leadership related to the specifics of the Khoja caste system. In other words, although the disagreement between the Aga Khan and a number of Khoja leaders was expressed in religious terms, the real issue was not restricted to religious affiliation: it was a matter of control over a community.

Karachi's communities in context

As in Bombay, the development of Karachi was closely linked to British colonisation; however, since the town was occupied by the British only in 1839, this took place some decades later than in Bombay. The British wanted to make optimal use of Karachi's location as the closest south Asian port to Europe. From 1850 to 1857, work to establish Karachi's role within the British imperial system was conducted by the Commissioner-in-Sind Sir Henry Bartle Frere, who ordered the removal of the sandbar at the mouth of the harbour which had prevented the entry of big ships, and he also planned the first railway line, which was opened in 1861. From 1843 to 1873, the value of Karachi's imports and exports grew from 1 million to 35 million rupees.[5] By 1913, Karachi was the largest wheat-exporting port of the British Empire with a shipment of 1,380,000 tons a year.[6] Such an evolution echoed that of Bombay some decades before. The economic growth of Karachi attracted many merchant communities, as well as unskilled workers who found employment as labourers in Karachi and other places in Sindh. Among the similarities between Bombay and Karachi, it is noteworthy that their populations were partially composed of the same groups, with a number of these groups playing the same leading role in the local economy.

As in Bombay, the Parsis were the pioneers. They were the first to understand the economic potential of Karachi, and thus migrated from Bombay to the expanding city. The merchants, however, were mostly Hindu and Muslim. The groups specialising in trade were often Gujarati, but in Karachi Hindus were also Sindhi, such as Lohanas, or Marwari.

Lohanas were the most influential trading caste in the city. They were themselves further divided into two groups: the *amils* and the *bhaibunds*. The *amils* worked in British administration, and, as such, provided most of the literati. The *bhaibunds* controlled most of the trade in interior Sindh and in Karachi. During the second half of the nineteenth century, they expanded

---

5 E. H. Aitken, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh* (Karachi, 1907), p. 369.

6 Hamida Khuhro and Anwer Mooraj (eds.), *Karachi*: *Megacity of Our Times* (Karachi, 1997), p. 40.

their commercial networks throughout most of the British Empire. In the view of many contemporary British officers, Lohanas were open-minded in comparison to other Hindu trading castes of India, in religion as well as with regard to social rules. Furthermore, in Sindh, *brahmans* were not numerous and they were mostly the Saraswats, who accepted food from the Lohanas, and also ate meat and drank alcohol.[7] Although the Saraswat *brahmans* were their spiritual guides, Lohanas were mostly Daryapanthis or Nanakpanthis. As Nanakpanthis, they followed the teachings of Guru Nanak and mainly worshipped his son Shri Chand. They nevertheless practiced the *panth* as a part of the tradition of the *sants* and the *bhakti*, not in the way of the Khalsa. Daryapanthis were worshippers of Udero Lal, the Indus River God.[8] Finally, Lohanas were also followers of Sindhi Sufi saints and a number among them were themselves Sufis, such as, for example, Dalpat Sufi (1769–1842).[9] While the caste system of the Lohanas is not well known because of a lack of sources, British officers highlighted the integrative process by which they reinforced their network. Lohanas used to welcome any other Hindus, although this did not extend to outcastes, while at village level a unique elders' council (*panchayat*) exercised authority over different Hindu castes, including the *brahmans*.

Among local Muslims, Khojas and Memons were mainly Sindhi and Kutchi, while Bohras were exclusively Gujarati. Memons were the most numerous in Karachi, and also in interior Sindh. Khojas were also settled in Lower Sindh while Bohras were confined to Karachi. All these communities had their origins in conversion from Hinduism, and since they specialised in trade, they were believed to be Lohanas who had converted to Islam at different times in the past. According to their own traditions, both Khojas and Bohras were understood to have been converted by Isma'ili *pirs* from the twelfth century onwards. Memons were said to have been converted from the fifteenth century by Sufi *pirs* belonging to the Qadiriyya order, hence their veneration for 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani, the Sufi saint from Baghdad. As in the rest of India, British officers stationed in Sindh believed that local Muslim

[7] E. H. Aitken, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh* (Karachi, 1907), pp. 182–183.

[8] See Lata Parwani, "Myths of Hhule Lal: Deconstructing a Sindhi Cultural Icon", in *Interpreting the Sindhi World*: *Essays on Society and History*, (eds) Michel Boivin and Matthew A. Coook (Karachi, 2010).

[9] Dalpat Sufi was the author of Sufi *kalam*s [works] in Sindhi, Persian and Hindi. He was an *amil* from Sehwan Sharif, but he gave up his work in the Talpur amirs' administration, and opened a shrine in Hyderabad where he spent his days in meditation. His poetry is still sung in the Sufi shrines of Sindh, especially in Jhok Sharif, a place he visited many times.

merchant communities were still ruled by a caste system, albeit one less strict than the norms of Brahmanical Hinduism. The main features of these social organisations included belonging to the group by birth, marital endogamy, hereditary lines of profession and also acceptance of decisions enacted by community councils. Non-compliance with such rules could be punished by excommunication, exactly in the same way that it worked among Hindu castes.

British rule, coupled with the emergence of a modern capitalist economy, had a tremendous impact on local society, including religious representations within it. In 1853, Bartle Frere imposed a given dialect as standard Sindhi, and one official alphabet among the dozen then being used. He also established the first government school in 1855, headed by Narayan Jagananth, a Marathi from Bombay who was in charge of delivering a "new education" which included modern sciences such as mathematics or geography, and many textbooks and literary works were translated from English to Sindhi. The spread of printing, and the expansion of a publishing programme, contributed to the reshaping of religious traditions, beginning with Sufism. Frere ordered a German priest, Ernst Trumpp (1828–1885) to complete an edition of Sufi poetry, the *Shah jo risalo*, which was published for the first time in 1866.

The consequence of the process of colonial modernisation was the birth of a new elite in Sindhi society who belonged to the middle-class *literati*. The old dominant classes remained: *'ulama*, *pirs*, *pandits*, landlords (*zamindars*) and tribal headmen (*sardars*). The members of the new elite were educated in British schools, and they usually worked in British administration. While members of the new Sindhi elite were also drawn to the reformist movements that were expanding across India, they were more or less characterised by a similar quest for original purity, based on a return to the original texts, and a rationalisation which led to the erosion of practices linked in varying degrees to superstition and magical practice. Among them, some, such as the Arya Samaj, were also advocating a new society implying the suppression of the caste system. In the wake of the Brahmo Samaj, Bengali reformists like Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884) and Ramakrishna (1836–1886) were influential locally once some young Sindhi Hindus became their followers. Led by Sadhu Hiranand Advani (1863–1893), a group of Hindu reformists from Hyderabad sought the modernisation of Hindu traditions, challenging the ban on widow remarriage, the payment of dowry and child marriage, as well as calling for the right for girls to study. Meanwhile, those Sindhi Muslims who were becoming part of the new elite were attracted by Sayyid

Ahmad Khan's reformism.[10] The Sindh Madrasa't al-Islam was established in Karachi in 1885 by his supporters, while in the same year a branch of the National Muhammadan Association created by Sayyid Ameer 'Ali was also launched in the city.

The Aga Khans and the Khojas

The Khojas, as one of the leading communities in Karachi, were among the first to be affected by the huge changes taking place in the city. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Khojas moving between Karachi and Bombay tended to be followers of the Isma'ili Imams. The lack of sources, however, makes it very difficult to be precise about the closeness of this link. For many, the Isma'ili Imam was just one spiritual guide among others, whether Sufi *pirs* or other *sants* related to different *panths*. Furthermore, Khojas were organised into a number of local castes, known as *jatis*, which were independent bodies whose authority was enacted by a council and acknowledged by all the members. Each *jati* was controlled by leading Khoja families, which were simultaneously the wealthier ones in the group, and, among them, a head (*mukhi*) was designated.

Given these realities, it is inappropriate to refer to 'Isma'ilism' as the 'religion' being practiced by the Khojas before the nineteenth century; indeed, the term was quite unknown in India prior to the famous Aga Khan Case of 1866. Nonetheless, as early as around 1825, the Iranian Shi'i leader Hasan 'Ali Shah, residing in Iran, decided to send his mother to India. The official reason for her visit was to propagate the Isma'ili creed, although she probably came to claim unpaid tithes.[11] Either way, in 1829, the Aga Khan, while still in Iran, entered a claim in the Sudder Court in Bombay against certain Khojas for non-payment of dues. This claim was the starting point of a longstanding dispute between the Aga Khans and those leadings Khojas – the wealthiest members of the *jati* – who had refused to pay the tithe. But in 1830, the suit was dropped and the recusants were directed to appear before the community, where they were excommunicated. Later on, in 1835,

[10] Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) was a Muslim reformer who advocated the reintroduction of the primacy of reason in Islamic sciences. He was also convinced that the integration of European sciences into Islamic teachings could benefit India's Muslims. He launched the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh on 24 May 1875 which became a university in 1920.

[11] The tithe, known as *dasond*, was between 10–12 per cent of the followers' earnings. Many other taxes were to be paid by the Khojas for any action they performed in relation to the Aga Khans.

a compromise was reached when the dissenters agreed to pay contributions in the future and gave 6,000 rupees in payment of arrears.[12]

In 1843, the same year that General Sir Charles Napier conquered the province on behalf of the British, Hasan 'Ali Shah settled in Sindh. He was the 46th living Imam of the Nizari Isma'ili Shi'as[13]. As such, he claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad, through Isma'il, the second son of the sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. After he had been posted as governor of Kirman, the south-east province of Iran, Hasan 'Ali Shah had rebelled and tried to create a kingdom of his own, but he was finally defeated by Muhammad Shah, the then shah of Iran. Once in Sindh, Hasan 'Ali Shah probably provided a cavalry corps for Napier, who defeated the *amirs* of Sindh at the twin battles of Miani and Daboo in 1843. Hasan 'Ali Shah then established his headquarters in Jherruk, a small but strategic town located between Hyderabad and Karachi, where he was officially posted by Napier. Hasan 'Ali Shah, however, did not stay long in Sindh, and moved on to Bombay, which was by then already a cosmopolitan city in which a number of Iranian refugees were already settled.

After the British conquest, Sindh was initially a separate province with Napier as governor and Karachi the provincial capital. But when Napier left Sindh in 1847, it was incorporated into the Bombay presidency and administered by a commissioner. Hasan 'Ali Shah's son and heir, 'Ali Shah, Aga Khan II from 1882 to 1885, frequently visited Sindh and Karachi; indeed, one of his sons and his ultimate successor, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1877–1957), was born in Karachi. In the judicial sources, 'Ali Shah is referred to as "the pir of the Khojas". Such a title is not to be confused with that of Sufism: in Isma'ili parlance, the title of *pir* was given to the Imam's deputy in a given area, but after Pir Taj al-Din (fifteenth century?), it was bestowed on close family members of the Imam. Finally, in the nineteenth century, *pir* was the title given to the Imam's heir.

Oral tradition still relates a number of narratives involving 'Ali Shah when he was the *wali 'ahd*, the heir of Hasan 'Ali Shah. First, it is said that 'Ali Shah was strongly opposed to saint worship. According to Sher 'Ali 'Alidina, he himself destroyed a *dargah* in deltaic Sindh near Pir Patho and stated: "There

12 Masselos, "The Khojas of Bombay", pp. 8–9.

13 The two main branches of Persian and Indian Shi'ism are Isna Ashari Shi'ism, or Twelver Shiism, and Isma'ili Shi'ism. The first branch is commonly tagged as Shi'ism. On Isma'ilism, see Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and their doctrines* (Cambridge, 1992).

is no saviour except the living Imam!”[14] ‘Ali Shah was obviously implementing a ‘charismatic centralisation’ in suppressing other places of worship that the Khojas used to visit, one that sometimes employed physical force as well as persuasion. According to oral tradition, ‘Ali Shah was also concerned with the question of depressed groups, especially, in British colonial parlance, the “outcastes”. It is said that he wanted to improve their situation by converting them to Isma‘ilism. Although it is difficult to state whether these recollections are, or are not, parts of a historical reconstruction, it is nevertheless clear that Karachi and Sindh were important sites of focus for the Aga Khans’ policy. Moreover, during ‘Ali Shah’s stay in Sindh, many new Khoja places of worship (*jama‘at khanas*) were built. The *jama‘at khana*, also known as *khoja khana*, was a place for worshipping the Aga Khans, and only Khojas could enter the building.

The judicial sources explored in this article are mainly drawn from two court cases. In both, the plaintiff was the Aga Khan III, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1877–1957). The first is the case “Mahomed Shah versus Nur Mahomed Lalan”, reported in 1902.[15] The defendant was Nur Muhammad Lalan, the son of Lalan Allahdino who was killed in 1879 by Aga Khani Khojas. Nur Muhammad was accused (along with his father) of having taken possession of buildings that were the Aga Khan’s property. Interestingly, these buildings were all connected with Muharram ceremonies, such as the *landhi* (the shed), the *chabil khana* (the water place), the *thalo* (platform) and the *kotho* (the godown).

The second source is the Ja‘far Fadu Case of 1910, published in 1925 by H. J. Lilley, Deputy Chief Officer of the Karachi Municipality.[16] Ja‘far Fadu was accused of having defamed the Aga Khani Khojas and the Aga Khan III in articles that he published in his two newspapers. Lilley’s 212-page book presented a summary of the different cases fought by the Aga Khans against those Khojas who seceded and became Isna ‘Ashari Shi‘a. The Ja‘far Fadu case thus formed part of a bigger set of cases that, in both Bombay and Karachi, involved the Aga Khans and so-called deviant Khojas. It is also interesting to observe that, because the Ja‘far Fadu Case hinged on the assassinations of secessionists by Aga Khani Khojas, Lilley in the subtitle of his book linked it

---

14 S. ‘Alidina, *Tarikh-i Imamat* (Karachi, 1952), p. 69.

15 V. Utamsing, *Selected Decisions of the Sind Sadar Court Relating to the Local Laws and Customs of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1909–1910), pp. 391–430.

16 H. J. Lilley (reported by), *Jaffer Fuddoo Defamation Case Containing Counsel’s Addresses to Courts and the Connected History of the Assassins* (Karachi, 1925).

to the history of the Assassins. There are also echoes of the Sadar Court Cases in that both involved the same Nur Lalan.

Furthermore, use is made here of documents connected with the Khoja Succession Bill, which have also been largely neglected by academic researchers. Although they are not all related to Sindh and Karachi, they provide a comprehensive picture of the general situation of Khoja communities and of their relations with the Aga Khans. The Khoja Succession Bill crystallised the issue of belonging to the Isma'ili or the Isna 'Ashari creed, and such issues impinged on matters beyond religious affiliation.

The Khoja sucession bill

Hasan 'Ali Shah eventually settled in Bombay in 1845. In the 1880s, age compelled him to delegate Imami powers to his heir, 'Ali Shah, especially in remote areas of the Bombay presidency such as in Sindh. Indeed, 'Ali Shah acted as the Imam in Sindh for more than 15 years before he was officially the Imam of the Isma'ili Shi'a. The work completed by 'Ali Shah, Aga Khan II (1881–1885), was thus considerable. As early as the 1870s, Hasan 'Ali Shah gave his elder son extensive authority, which allowed him to implement the eradication of other potential saviors. He was also in charge of the harmonisation of the rules and regulations of the Khoja communities.

After the first disagreement between Aga Khan I and the Khojas, the dispute was supposed to have been settled by the Aga Khan Case of 1866. The judge Arnould had stated that the Aga Khan was the spiritual head of (all) Khojas, and that he was the owner of all communal properties. As followers of the Aga Khans, Khojas were thus compelled to give him the tithe. According to Arnould, the Khojas were "a sect of people whose ancestors were Hindus in origin, which was converted to and has throughout abided in the faith of the Shia Imami Ismailis, and which has always been and still is bound by ties of spiritual allegiance to the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis".[17] The most surprising development is that while previously Khojas had always been addressed by British officers as a caste, they were now, in Arnould's words, a sect. Social organisation was now superseded by an alternative terminology of religious organisation. The introduction of this religious terminology was no trivial matter. It at once implied that the Aga Khan's authority was spiritual, and also that, since the Khojas were no longer a caste, they were thus not a social body ruled by its own *panchayat*.

[17] Quoted in J. C. Masselos, "The Khojas of Bombay", p. 16.

Such an audacious treatment given to the Aga Khan and the Khojas was possible because of lacunas in so called Anglo-Muhammadan law, which was largely based on Hanafi texts translated into English at the end of the eighteenth century. The translation of Shi'i legal texts had also been planned, but it was abandoned in 1808 due to lack of funding.[18] Although important differences existed before Sunni and Shi'i laws were accepted as early as 1841, it was not until 1865 that Neil Baillie in his *Digest of Muhammadan Law* added some Shi'i texts on law. Other Muslim communities, like Khojas or Memons, who adhered to Hindu law for inheritance, thus fell outside the scope of Anglo-Muhammadan law. It would take until 1922 before the definition of a Muslim was answered, when the Madras High Court stated that anybody claiming that Muhammad was a prophet and the supreme authority of the Quran would be accepted as Muslim.

Nonetheless, the Aga Khan Case did not persuade many Khojas, and consequently it did not put an end to the competition between the Aga Khan and Khoja caste leaders. Under these circumstances, 'Ali Shah with the help of the British decided to employ a new strategy. He was behind a bill that would greatly help to crystallise the membership (and thereby to reinforce divisions within the Khoja community) by legally defining the rules of Khoja succession and inheritance. But as the name suggests, all Khojas were involved, whether Sunni, Shi'i or Isma'ili. In an earlier case tried in 1847, the Sajun–Meer Ali Case, Hasan 'Ali Shah had sent his brother Muhammad Baqir to argue in favour of the rule for inheritance as laid down in the Quran[19]. It seems that the protests were issued by the Khojas. Indeed, the difference between Islamic law and Hindu law was significant because in the first, women inherited a half share and in the second, they did not inherit.

In 1878, the government of Bombay appointed a Khoja Commission, headed by Justice Maxwell Melvill. Among its members was 'Ali Shah, heir to the Imamate and the "pir of Khoja", as he is referred to in all the sources. Note that no Isna 'Ashari Khoja took part. A bill was drafted in October 1884. This was a technical document which consisted of 51 pages divided into eight chapters. After a preliminary chapter, the following three were devoted to the regulation of the estate of a Khoja who died without heirs. The fifth chapter focused on the succession of women who were part-owners of a property.

[18] Michael Anderson, "Islamic law and the colonial encounter in British India", in *Institutions and Ideology: A SOAS South Asia Reader*, (eds) David Arnold and Peter Robb, (Richmond, 1993), pp. 174–175.

[19] H. J. Lilley, p. 56.

Other issues were addressed by the bill, such as marriage and funerals.[20] Before enacting this as law, the Bombay government decided to ask British officials in the territories where Khojas were established, both within and outside British India, to conduct an investigation. In 1884, the proposed bill was sent to British officials in the Bombay Presidency, the Punjab, Zanzibar and the Sultanate of Oman. The officials had the task of "get[ting] input from the community of Khojas … on the provisions of Khoja Succession Bill".[21] Opinions reported by officials proved to be far from harmonious. In the case of the Punjab, although the 1881 census quoted 61,297 Khojas as living in this province, the name "Khoja" was clearly attributed to people who were not of the same caste as the Khojas of Bombay. Hence the comment of C. L. Tupper, secretary of the Punjab government: "The bill applies to all India, and it applies to all properties of all Khojas. However, we do not find any definition of Khoja". The Khojas of Punjab were generally Sunni, and therefore inherited according to Islamic law. B. H. B. Powell, a district judge, went even further: "Why is it necessary to define and set a custom [*sic*] for a small section of the population while the vast majority of Hindus and Muslims who do not follow Muhammadan law does not?"[22]

Another interesting case was that of Khojas in Oman. According to Lt Col. S. B. Miles, British Consul in Muscat, who drew a detailed picture of their position, they all hailed from Sindh, especially in Hyderabad, and were therefore known as Hyderabadis but also as "Looteeas". With approximately 1,300 people, Khojas were divided into three groups: the Isma'ilis, Twelver Shi'as and Sunnis. The consul, however, recognised the merits of the bill as it was observed that existing laws of inheritance were generally vague, and that the interpretation given to them by the *mukhis*, the heads of local communities, was highly variable, which ultimately could lead to abuses.

Isma'ili Khojas on the whole were not very interested in the issue: they just wanted to know if the bill was approved by the Imam, who was by then 'Ali Shah, Aga Khan II. Once they had been satisfied on this matter, they could not see the benefit of discussing the bill. However, in Kutch, Khojas asked for one item to be changed: this was Section 48 of Chapter VIII "Miscellaneous", which stated that if someone died without Khoja heirs, his property would go

---

20 "Bill to Amend and Define law as to succession to Khoja" Home Department, Judicial Branch, Proceedings 123–134 (A), National Archives of India, 1884.

21 "Papers related to the Bill to amend and define the Law of Testamentary and Instate Succession to Khojas", IOR/L/PJ/6/163, file 1987, 1884.

22 "Papers related to the Bill to amend and define the Law of Testamentary and Instate Succession to Khojas", IOR/L/PJ/6/142/2521.

to the crown. Instead, they wished this section to be amended so that the assets went to the community to help the poor. Twelver Khojas did not discuss the bill but for other reasons. In 1872, they had indeed "signed a document in which they expressed their resolve to be guided by the Muhammadan law for all issues". They therefore opposed this bill because they did not intend to "go back to the ancient custom of Khojas". They also noted that no Twelver Khojas were represented in the Khoja Commission.

The most serious criticism of the bill was expressed by the Sunni Khojas of Bombay, who wrote a letter to the governor of Bombay in 1884, and organised a petition dated 1886 addressed to the Viceroy of India himself, Sir Frederick Hamilton-Temple. The author of the letter was anonymous and he signed with the significant pseudonym "impartial justice". The authors of the petition expressed their surprise at having learned of the Khoja Succession Bill in the press in 1886. They continued by arguing that if this bill were passed, Khojas, who considered themselves as Muslim, would become infidels.

The argument advanced by the petitioners was well constructed. It summed up earlier legal decisions showing that Muslims had to be governed by Islamic law, beginning with the 1828 status. The petition mentioned the Sajun–Meer 'Ali Case, in which Hasan 'Ali Shah had sent his brother to uphold the applicability of the Islamic law of inheritance to Khojas. It ended with a reference to the declaration by Queen Victoria in 1857, after the Indian Mutiny, in which the sovereign recognised the right of her Indian subjects to practice freely the religion of their choice without government interference. The petition concluded with a scathing formula: "Therefore, the Khoja Succession Act should be more properly characterised as Kafir Khoja Succession Act".[23]

Given the importance of recriminations that made a consensus impossible, the Khoja Succession Bill was never enacted. The issue of Khoja inheritance was left to the discretion of local judges; and so in Karachi it was decided that it was possible for a Khoja who wished to inherit according to Hindu custom could do so. Interestingly, the Khoja Succession Bill was drafted soon after the excommunication of Lalan, and it showed that the "Khoja" designation was an umbrella for a number of independent *jatis*. The result of the enquiry was thus opposite to its aim: rather than unifying a possible Khoja community, it emphasised that Khojas were divided into a number of *jatis*. Consequently, the Aga Khan would never be able to control all caste

---

[23] "Papers related to the Bill to amend and define the Law of Testamentary and Instate Succession to Khojas", IOR/L/PJ/6/163, file 1987, 1884.

properties. Furthermore, it highlighted an inconsistency: namely, that a living Shiʿi Imam, or his heir, was seeking to impose a Hindu law of succession upon his alleged Muslim disciples.[24] The episode of the Khoja Succession Bill thus indicates the desperation of the Aga Khans to take control of the social structures of the caste. Furthermore, the astonishment of some British officers about the special treatment given to the Aga Khans and the Khojas throws light on the protection provided by the Raj to the Ismaʿili Imams.

The Aga Khans and the Khojas before the break

Before Hasan ʿAli Shah's advent in 1843, Khojas amounted to about one hundred of 14,000 inhabitants in Karachi. In interior Sindh, they were mostly settled in the south of the province, in the area located to the east of the western branch of the Indus delta. Some of them were already among the leading merchants of Karachi, mainly involved in the trade of fish or of leather dye.[25] However, these occupations suggested that they had originated from a low caste background, with leather dyeing especially performed by outcaste communities. After the strong earthquake of 1819, which was centred in Kutch, many Khojas migrated, with other merchants, to Karachi, after the main harbour Shah Bandar was deprived of access to the sea by the earthquake.

As stated above, the Khoja community of Karachi was Sindhi but also Kutchi. Kutchi Khojas migrated to Karachi after famines which occurred at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, it is difficult to be precise about the relations between Hasan ʿAli Shah, Aga Khan I and the Khojas of Sindh. According to the judgement of Earnest [sic] Sands, City Magistrate, Karachi, Pirais were reformed Khojas and Panjbhais orthodox Khojas.[26] And in "H. H. Aga Sultan Mahomed Shah versus Nur Mahomed Lalan", dated 1902, Judge McPherson stated that "Pirais … at the time of Moharram make a greater exhibition of grief than the party of the 'Panjbhais' do".[27] It is also clearly stated that Pirais and Isna ʿAsharis are not to be confused: "As a Pirai,

[24] The exclusion of women from inheritance obviously made sense in a trader community, since it reduced the division of property.

[25] H. B. Thomas (ed.), *Memoirs on Sindh*, (Karachi 1855), 2, p. 236.

[26] H. J. Lilley, p. 92.

[27] V. Utamsing, *Selected Decisions of the Sind Sadar Court Relating to the Local Laws and Customs of the Province of Sind* (Karachi 1909–1910), p. 400.

they must show allegiance to the Aga Khan; as an Isna 'Ashari they threw off that allegiance".[28]

In Karachi, the critical period in terms of these divisions took place between 1876 – when the first major challenge occurred through the excommunication of a dissenter, Lalan – and 1905, when protesters officially rallied to Isna 'Ashari Shi'ism. The reading of the judicial sources nevertheless suggests one important fact: that the Shi`ite rituals of Moharram were largely practiced by all the Khojas, whether they were Pirais or Panjbhais. Mukhi Chandu, a former head of the Aga Khani Khojas in Karachi, stated that a first *chabil khana* was built in 1840, before Hasan 'Ali Shah's arrival. A new one was built in 1868 with Khoja subscriptions.[29] According to the rules provided by 'Ali Shah, the Khojas were compelled "to read mourning verses and religious histories".[30] The question, then, is whether Shi'i practices were performed by Khojas before the advent of Hasan 'Ali Shah. The *marsiyas* could have been popular in Sindhi communities at large, since the 'national' poet of Sindh Shah 'Abd al-Latif (1689–1752), devoted a chapter of his *Shah jo Risalo* to the tragedy of Karbala. Muhammad Muhsin (1709–1750) had already introduced Persian *marsiya*s in Sindh. Abstracts of Shah 'Abd al-Latif's Sufi work can be found in Khoja manuscripts, as well as *marsiyas* by Sabit 'Ali Shah (1740–1805), the first Sindhi author to devote a work to *marsiyas*. Moreover, during the reign of the Talpurs (1785–1840), who were Shi'a, a state-funded policy was also in operation. Finally, although it is not easy to trace, fragments of Shi'i culture were already permeating Sindhi culture from the late-eighteenth century onwards, and certainly by the time of the period under discussion here.

Under such circumstances, it is necessary to summarise the causes of dissent between the Aga Khans and the Khojas according to available judicial sources. In Karachi, the dissent can be related to four main causes. First, Khojas there stated that the Aga Khan was a *pir*, a spiritual guide, and not an incarnation of God as he claimed.[31] The date of 1876 marked a turning point in this, since it was also the year when regulations were provided to the Khojas in the presence of 'Ali Shah. The second cause related to the teaching of the

[28] H. J. Lilley, p. 71.

[29] V. Utamsing, p. 407.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 411. For Richard Burton, they were specialists of *marsiya*s; the *marsiya*s are also well attested by the nineteenth-century Khoja manuscripts held by the Institute of Isma'ili Studies in London.

[31] H. J. Lilley, p. 108.

Quran in the Khoja community. In the Ja'far Fadu Case, witnesses claimed that 'Ali Shah objected to the development of education and teaching of the Quran among Khojas, because when he had been *pir* of the Khojas, he had banned the Quran from being taught to children. According to one witness, 'Ali Shah was opposed to education because, once educated, Khojas would not pay their tithe any longer.[32] This was certainly one of the reasons which led to Lalan's excommunication. He had arranged for a *sayyid*, Nusrat 'Ali Shah, to teach the Quran to his own children, like other Khojas. Refusing to get rid of him as 'Ali Shah requested, Lalan was excommunicated on 17 February 1876. On 2 March, he was the victim of an assassination attempt, and eventually on 24 February 1879, he was murdered.[33] Nusrat 'Ali Shah was himself assassinated in 1896 in Karachi.[34] For others, the dissent was due to the fact that the Aga Khan banned Khojas from practising the pillars of Islam.[35]

The third cause is the complaint that the Aga Khan had compelled his Khoja followers to give up their ancestral religious rites and to adopt new doctrines.[36] The clash occurred in 1876 between a leading Khoja, Lalan, and 'Ali Shah, who was then the "pir of the Khojas". 'Ali Shah excommunicated Lalan because he refused to return the keys of the sanctuaries where they attended the worship.[37] His son Nur Muhammad Lalan was very explicit as to the origin of the disagreement: the Aga Khan wanted to force them to abandon their ancestral religious rites and to adopt new doctrines.[38] Lalan and other secessionist were called *kara kutas* (black dogs), which is a significant insult since both "black" and "dog" refer to impurity. It is equivalent to exclusion from the community.

A last cause is expressed in the *Gazetteer of Sindh* published in 1907. Here the reason given for the break between Isna 'Ashari and Isma'ili Khojas was the procession of *tabuts*, miniature cenotaphs of Husain that are paraded for 'Ashura.[39] A group of Khojas known as the Pirais (from *pir*, the Sindhi name

32 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
35 S. A. Sadiq Ali, *A Short Sketch Historical and Traditional of the Musulman Races Found in Sindh, Baluchistan and Afghanistan, Their Genealogical Sub-divisions and Sects Together with Ethnological and Ethnographical Accounts*, (Karachi, 1901), p. 66.
36 V. Utamsing, p. 392.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 414.
38 *Ibid.*, p. 392.
39 E. H. Aitken, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh* (Karachi 1907), p. 176.

of the place where the *tabuts* were stored) refused to abandon the practice after the Aga Khan forbade it.[40]

Hence, it was Shi'i rituals that lay at the core of the disagreement between the Aga Khans and a faction of Khojas in Karachi. It is equally striking that the leading Khojas of Karachi, who were also the wealthiest, wanted to 'modernise' and simultaneously to 'Islamise' their practices, probably under the influence of Islamic reformism in India, since they wanted to be taught in Quranic matters. This wish clashed with the agenda of the Aga Khan, which was to implement strategies for taking control of the caste as a whole. 'Ali Shah himself was quite explicit: "They will not pay the tithe anymore". But the focus of leading Khojas on scriptural sources of Islam allowed them to by-pass the Aga Khans' authority, since the latter, as Muslims, were not believed to be able to claim priority over the Quran. Finally, Khoja leaders sought to preserve the caste's independence as a social body. But in discarding the Aga Khans' authority, they were also exempted from paying the tithe and the many taxes that were imposed on his followers.

The birth of the Isna 'Ashari community

It remains unclear what was the exact nature of the relationship between the dissidents, known as Pirais, and the loyalists, known as Panjbhais, in the period from 1876 to 1905. Were they already separate communities? Although some were excommunicated, the majority of the Pirais remained in the bosom of the local Aga Khani Khoja community: for instance, Lalan himself was buried in the cemetery of Panjbhais. In addition, there were several cases in Bombay where excommunicated Khojas were later reintegrated into the community, after payment of arrears relating to tithes and other taxes. In 1876, however, one of the reasons given for the dispute between Lalan and the Panjbhais was that he wanted to build an *imamwara* (or *imambara*) near the Panjbhais' *jama'at khana*.[41] They would have refused on the grounds that their religious feelings were offended by the teaching of heterodox doctrine

[40] Indeed, Isna 'Ashari Khojas have retained that name in Karachi even though very few can explain its meaning today. The Aga Khan's party is still usually named as the Panjbhais, or, Panjabhais, because the Aga Khan I should have been first defended in Bombay by a group of five brothers. The *varas* was the head of the Panjbhais.

[41] The *imamwara* is a place devoted to the Shi'i Imams, especially Husain, while the *jama'at khana*, as we saw before, was a place devoted to the Aga Khan's cult, and under construction during this period.

so close to their place of worship.[42] But Pirais were still followers of the Aga Khan and they came to honour him in person every time he visited Karachi.

It was an Aga Khan's tour that provided an immediate excuse for the split. It was then a duty binding on Khojas to pay homage to the Imam when he visited: not attending was tantamount to committing a sacrilege. In 1902, however, a group of Pirais refrained from going to the *jama'at khana*. This act clearly meant that they rejected allegiance to the Imam. But while this does not tell us when the term "Isna 'Ashari" appeared in Bombay and Karachi, the position is clearer regarding the conditions of employment: "The term was apparently applied to everyone, whether Pirai or Panjbhai, who rejected their allegiance to the Aga Khan, and who is voluntarily seceded or were excommunicated".[43] Between 1902 and 1905, the position of Pirai Khojas was a challenge for Panjbhais. In 1902, the most radical Panjbhais had stopped talking to them for not having "to eat or drink with them".[44] The Aga Khan himself did not share that position and he encouraged Panjbhais to maintain relationships with Pirais. In August 1903, a group of 250 influential Panjbhai Khojas petitioned the Commissioner-in-Sind to inform him that one Ja'far Fadu was a Pirai, and as such he could not be appointed as representative of Khojas in the municipality of Karachi.[45]

The birth of Pirais as a separate community was on 15 October 1905, when the Husaini Bagh, the Pirai cemetery, was inaugurated. The beginning of the twentieth century was a very challenging period for the Aga Khan. In the same year, 1905, the Haji Bibi Case started in Bombay. The Aga Khan III was attacked by his own family, denying him the right to be Imam. It is thus significant that in the same year of 1905, S. G. Haji published a new official genealogical chart of the Aga Khan, on 21 August, which, it is said, cancelled the previous one dated 26 June. For the first time, the Aga Khan's genealogy officially traced his family back to the Prophet Muhammad through Husain, Hasan and 'Ali. The Hindu reference, in which he appears as an *avatar* of the Hindu god Vishnu, was withdrawn.[46]

---

42 H. J. Lilley, p. 23.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
46 S. G. Haji, *Genealogical Table of H. H. the Hon'able Sir Aga Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan* (Karachi 1905). This reference was nevertheless still expressed in the devotional literature of the Khojas; but the literature was kept secret – it was not disclosed to non-Khojas.

Such an Islamic normalisation was quite urgent. In practice, this Aga Khan was heir to the Muslim modernist tradition of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and others[47], and had become one of the leaders of the Muslims of India. In 1906, he headed the famous delegation at Simla asking the Viceroy to establish separate electorates for Indian Muslims. The construction of the Husain Bagh followed a formal declaration of Panjbhais, according to which the burial of a Khoja was subject to a prior request for authorisation from the *mukhi*, the head of a local Aga Khani community, or his deputy, the *kamriya*. In addition, in early 1906, Panjbhais issued a new resolution which excommunicated the Khojas "or sympathisers [who] were associated with Pirais and Ithnasharis".[48] It is clear that from this moment, the two terms of "Pirai" and "Isna 'Ashari" became equivalent. As the appeal of Ja'far Fadu in 1910 summarises: "At the same time, the Pirais adopted the name of Isna 'Asharis and seem to have definitely renounced all faith in Aga Khan".[49]

It was also during this phase of transition that Pirais endowed a new place of worship, the *mumbar*. A very common complaint against them was that they used to pray with the Twelvers in their *mumbar*. This term comes from the Arabic *minbar*, which refers to the chair found in a mosque where the preacher gives his sermon. In the Indian sub-continent, the Shi'a sometimes used the term to designate a place devoted to Imam Husain. After the rupture, Pirai Khojas emphasised the intransigence shown by the Aga Khan against them. Aga Khani Khojas were forbidden to associate with them, as clearly stated in the *Rules and Regulations* elaborated in 1928.[50] Article 136 of the Chapter V "Miscellaneous Matters" is explicit: "Ismailis shall not take no part with secessionists in matters concerning religion. If any one does so the Council is authorised to punish him even to excommunication".[51]

As we saw before, the Aga Khan III was the plaintiff in both the cases under scrutiny here, and, as such, he also represented Panjbhais. Interestingly, the targets of these cases were prominent Karachi Khojas. Nur Mohamad Lalan was the scion of a powerful Karachi Khoja family. His grandfather Alleeno was *varas*, as well as his great grandfather Jiand.[52] Ja'far Fadu (1867–1959) was a leading Khoja merchant in Sindh. He was the founder of a dispensary, located opposite the existing *jama'at khana* at Kharadar, which is still in

[47] Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, had met him in Aligarh.
[48] H. J. Lilley, p. 100.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[50] *Rules of the Shia Imami Isma'ilis of Karachixe "Karachi"* (Karachi, 1928), p. 35.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[52] V. Utamsing, p. 404.

operation. Fadu published two newspapers in collaboration with Harchandrai Vishandas, *The Phoenix* in English and *Praja Mitra* in Gujrati, in which he outlined his grievances against the Aga Khan. He was thus excommunicated by the Aga Khani community and he also became Pirai.

Another excommunicated Khoja, Ghulam Husain Khaliqdina, was also an important figure in Karachi. He was a prominent member of the Karachi Municipal Corporation and was a founding member of the office of Sindh Madrasa't-ul-Islam. He created the Khaliqdina Hall and Library, which still exists on M.A. Jinnah Road. He was also the builder of the first public baths in Karachi, at Machi Miani. Khaliqdina, however, was condemned by the Aga Khan because he frequented the Pirais. He eventually became a follower of Twelver Shi'ism. Meanwhile, some families were divided on the issue. The person who attempted to murder Lalan in 1876 was Basariya Fadu, Ja'far Fadu's brother. Basariya Fadu (1848–1918) would later be appointed *varas* (the Imam's deputy) by the Imam, although the crime he had committed earned him a sentence of eight years in prison.

Later on, during the first decades of the twentieth century, some Khojas called themselves "reformers" but did not leave the Isma'ili community. One year before the constitution was given to the Karachi Khojas, one Karim Goolamali published an "open letter" to the Aga Khan III.[53] In 1928, he published *An Appeal to Mr. Ali Salomon Khan*, which provides another summary of the history of the dissent.[54] Although Goolamali borrowed a number of pieces from Bombay court cases, the grievances were voiced very strongly when he claimed that the Aga Khan pretended to be God, and that the Aga Khani Khoja religion was nothing other than a source of income. While his words implied that all actions within the religion carried a fee, Goolamali was nevertheless never excommunicated; he, with his partners, would never convert to Twelver Shi'ism. As such, the mechanisms of Isma'ili Khoja belonging had apparently been relaxed.

Thus, the birth of the Isna 'Ashari Khoja community in Karachi paradoxically contributed to the reinforcement of the Aga Khani Khoja community. Although it allowed a faction, which was a minority, to remain independent from the Aga Khans' authority, it was also the starting point of the building of a new community that remained largely unchallenged. And when it was, as Goolamali's case attested, this took place within the scope of the community. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Sultan

[53] K. Goolamali, *An Open Letter to H. H. the Aga Khan* (Karachi, 1927).
[54] K. Goolamali, *An Appeal to Mr. Ali Salomon Khan* (Karachi, 1928).

Muhammad Shah finally forbade the Shi'i rituals of Moharram among his followers. But with education by now broadly spread among Indian Muslims at large, he also started a publishing programme of religious books whereby the caste rituals were kept when they could be reoriented towards his own person, or, when it was not possible, simply suppressed.[55]

The main clue to these developments provided by Karachi judicial sources is that the Khojas who led the dissent belonged to Khoja families that were dominating the caste. The negotiations that occurred throughout the period took place between the Aga Khans, spiritual guides who were trying to control a caste, and a caste as an independent social body, which was fighting a religious authority to keep its independence. The two leading families were those of the Lalanis and of the Fadwanis. According to the judicial sources, the Lalanis kept the keys of the caste buildings, evidence that they were ruling the caste in Karachi. The Fadwanis, probably a rival family, decided to stay by the side of the Aga Khan. They finally succeeded in ruling the caste, albeit in the name of the Aga Khan. Hence, although he was directly involved in the murder of a Lalani, a Fadwani was appointed as head of the community.

Conclusion

To conclude, as this brief study shows, the process of division between the Isna 'Ashari and Aga Khani Khojas took place over the course of several decades, with the final break occurring around 1910 after many years of community relations between Pirais and Panjbhais. The dissent took a number of forms: the dissenters claimed that the Aga Khan was opposed to Islamic education, wanted to suppress their ancestral beliefs and practices (those that the judicial sources named as "the shared Shi'i rituals"), and wanted to take over their communal buildings. This suggests that the reformers were expressing a resistance from the Khoja community as an independent social body – a caste – confronting a religious authority coming from outside, namely Iran, with a quite different religious culture. Finally, using Weberian typology, the Karachi judicial sources provide a picture of the process among the Khojas of transforming from a caste, a body defined by social and kinship structures, to a sect, a term expressing a more religious affiliation.[56]

---

55 For a detailed analysis of the process, see M. Boivin, *Les Agha Khans et les Khojas*: *Islam chiite et dynamiques sociales dans le sous-continent indien contemporain* (Paris, 2013).

56 On this point, it is interesting to observe that the sources, including the *Rules and Regulations* of the Khojas of 1928, use the word "excommunication" rather than "ostracism": as Lilley puts it, excommunication is the "loss of eternal salvation". H. J. Lilley, p. 77.

The Karachi court cases clearly underline that so-called shared Shiʿi rituals were largely practised by the mid-nineteenth century Khojas, and were clearly among the major features of the community's religious culture. While they also attest that the dissenter party refused to acknowledge the Aga Khan as a divine figure, the dispute crystallised over the matter of property in the shape of buildings, which appeared as the very symbols of the caste. Although, officially, the Aga Khan Case of 1866 recognised that the Aga Khan was the owner of all Khoja buildings, reformers stated that the buildings belonged to the caste itself. But it is not easy to investigate how exactly the cleavage between reformers and loyalists later played out: in other words, why some Khojas deserted the Aga Khan while others did not. This challenge is further attested by the fact that the dissenters were among the oldest Khoja families, probably those who were controlling the caste before the coming of Hasan ʿAli Shah in the mid-nineteenth century. Accordingly, the Karachi sources provide a fresh perspective on the community-building processes of Indian Muslim groups in north-west colonial India.

3 Local Nodes of a Transnational Network

A case study of a Shi'i family in Awadh, 1900–1950

Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan

The Islamic world, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was forced to address new social and political exigencies as a result of imperialism and the increasing push of globalisation. India in many ways represented a microcosm of all these struggles. Although these new interactions propelled debates of reconfiguring and renegotiating ideas of identity, particularly amongst Muslims, they did not entirely subsume older networks as shall be demonstrated in this article. Instead, these new local and transnational networks built upon and expanded traditional links between centres of Muslim authority and peripheral areas, primarily through utilising existing hereditary structures and established lines of authority.

A considerable corpus of scholarship exists on Muslim thought, Islamic modernism and Muslim reformers in India. However, most of this has dealt with areas, issues and people from Sunni schools of thought. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Maulana Mawdudi of the Jama'at-i Islami, Allamah Iqbal, Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, the Deoband movement, the Nadwa't-ul 'Ulama, the Ahl-i Hadith and Ahl-i Qur'an movements and many other prominent organisations and people have been written about extensively. However, comparatively little work has been done on the sizeable Shi'i community and particularly their *ashraf* (elite) and the role they played in finding a balance between Islam and nationalism and defining their own identities when faced with the social, economic and most importantly political exigencies of the time. Apart from Athar 'Abbas Rizvi's rich yet broad historical work, Juan Cole's detailed study of the origins of north Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Justin Jones's timely work on the Shi'a in colonial

India, there has been very little focus on the prominent Shiʿi families of India.[1] Indeed no work has been done on the Mahmudabad family.

Thus, this article analyses two recent generations of this particular leading Shiʿi family: Maharaja Muhammad ʿAli Muhammad Khan (1878–1931CE), henceforth referred to as the Maharaja, and Raja Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan (1914–1973), henceforth referred to as the Raja. The Maharaja played a pivotal role in starting and supporting the Home Rule Movement. A close friend of Sir Harcourt Butler, he took an active part in the creation of Benares Hindu University, Lucknow University, King George's Medical College and Aligarh Muslim University as well as other institutions, and was a prominent leader of the All India Muslim League. Like his father, Amir-ud-daula Raja Muhammad Amir Hasan Khan (c.1848–1903), he too wrote poetry. Perhaps the most important and enduring religious legacy of the Maharaja was the creation of the Madrasa't-ul Waʿizeen, in memory of his younger brother Sahabzada Muhammad ʿAli Ahmad Khan who passed away at a young age. The *madrasa* was founded as a religious postgraduate college with the aim of spreading correct information about Shiʿism, addressing misconceptions and partaking in *tabligh* (missionary work).

The Raja was a key member of the Muslim League and a close confidant of Muhammad ʿAli Jinnah. Like his ancestors, and perhaps even more so, the Raja was gifted in the arts. Indeed, Rabindranath Tagore wanted him to attend Shantiniketan but Jinnah prevailed over the young Raja, declaring "I shall be your university". Like his forebears "the Raja of Mahmudabad put his faith first throughout his life; he was a member of the Islamic *Jamaʿat*, and as a believer in Pakistan as an Islamic state he disagreed with Jinnah in the 1940s".[2] However he changed his views later on in life as shall be demonstrated in a subsequent section.

This article will trace the three networks in which this particular family engaged: the local, the national and the transnational. The first section will discuss the links of the *ashraf* to the shrine cities in Iran and Iraq. It will also draw out marriage and kinship patterns and explore how these often reinforced links both to religious institutions and to the wider Muslim community. The second section will explore the links between the *ʿulama* and religious institutions, using the example of the *madrasa*. The third section will seek

[1] Saiyed Athar ʿAbbas Rizvi, *A socio-intellectual history of the Isna ʿAshari Shiʿis in India* (Delhi, 1986); J. Cole, *Roots of north Indian Shiʿism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and state in Awadh 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988); J. Jones, *Shiʿa Islam in colonial India: religion, community and sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012).

[2] F. Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Oxford, 2000), p. 200.

to chart their transnational links and the context in which these networks were created and sustained, drawing on the publications of the *madrasa*. It is important to state that these three spheres or networks were not mutually exclusive, and indeed instances of overlap and areas in which they reinforced each other will be highlighted in the conclusion.

The ashraf, *the* ʿatabat *and* ʿulama

This first section will highlight the way in which ties were forged between members of the Mahmudabad family and the *ʿulama* of the *ʿatabat-i ʿaliyat* (the holy shrine cities of Iraq), particularly given the fact that the family had been Sunnis until the late eighteenth century. The discussion will be placed in the context of the wider trend of the influence of the *ashraf* of north India on these shrine cities.[3] Later sections will clarify how the ties were maintained and indeed strengthened.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were an age of great intellectual ferment for the *ʿulama* of the Shiʿi world. The shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq and Qom in Iran established themselves as the flag bearers of Shiʿi theology and jurisprudence. Questions relating to temporal authority and an individual's relationship to the state had been at the centre of Shiʿi discourse over the centuries. A new era of religious discussion and debate began roughly after the death of Muhammad Baqir Ispahani Bihbihani (d. 1791 CE) with "the emergence of a new generation of religious leaders in Shiʿism".[4] Bihbihani arguably pioneered the triumph of Usulism over Akhbarism. The rapid progress in technology also meant safer and quicker travel, which in turn led greater interaction between the *ʿulama* and *shurafa* (notable classes) of the greater Shiʿi world and the shrine cities. As an illustration, when in 1801 Wahhabis ransacked the shrine of Karbala, the restoration work was funded by Saʿadat ʿAli Khan of Awadh.

The shrine cities "remained open to talented newcomers throughout the last two centuries".[5] One of Bihbihani's students was a young *ʿalim* (scholar), Dildar ʿAli Nasirabadi, who came to Iraq from Awadh as an *Akhbari*, and, under the tutelage of his mentor, became *Usuli*. Perhaps the largest single regular payment was in the form of the Oudh [Awadh] Bequest. A staggering sum of nearly six million rupees was sent to *mujtahid*s (jurists) in Najaf and

---

3 For further information about this period, see Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*.

4 M. Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The ʿulama of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 18.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Karbala between 1852 and 1903 in an effort by the British government to control *mujtahid*s indirectly. The British government's hand in distributing the money ensured that the Ottoman government perceived the Shi'a as British allies in Iraq, and also served as a counterbalance to increasing Russian influence in Iran through the form of Russian loans.

Ultimately British efforts to control the *mujtahid*s ended in failure because "charity, however generous, [could not] compensate for the need of religious leaders to maintain popular support by distancing from foreign patronage and tutelage".[6] One such struggle for power was in Karbala over the distribution of the funds from the Oudh Bequest. Mirza Hasan Shirazi, later involved in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran and in the tobacco concessions, vied for power with Shaykh Zain al-'Abideen al-Mazenderani in Karbala. Major Jennings, in his capacity as the British Envoy, sought to persuade the latter to accept Shirazi as the distributor and was angrily rebutted by Mazendarani who said "I am the Mujtahid here".[7] It would seem that the transnational Shi'i community and especially the political and social elite of Awadh, by deciding which *mujtahid*s would be the recipients of funds, to some extent affected and controlled the debate between the Akhbari and Usuli *'ulama*. Bahu Begum, the wife of Sa'adat 'Ali Khan, for instance, willed a large part of her estate to specific members of the *'ulama* in the shrine cities. In 1888 when Amir-ud-daula went to Iraq for a year-long pilgrimage and spent time in both shrine cities, he paid off the debt of Mazendarani and in return was given a *shamshir*[8] (sword) and a *sanad* (deed) stating that he had served the *ummah* (community) and was a "leader amongst leaders" and a "servant of the shrine and the community".[9] We see then that deep ties had already been established between members of the Mahmudabad family and *'ulama* in the

6 M. Litvak, "A Failed Manipulation: The British, the Oudh Bequest and the Shi'i 'ulama of Najaf and Karbala", *The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 27, 1 (2000), p. 69.

7 Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq*, p. 18.

8 The *shamshir*, a curved sword similar to a scimitar, was originally given to the treasury of the shrine of Imam 'Ali in Najaf by Fateh 'Ali Shah Qajar and according to its cartouches, or *toranj* in Farsi, was crafted by a man called 'Imad Isphahani on the orders of Shah 'Abbas-i Safavi I (1571–1629 CE) who referred to himself as the *Banda-i Shah-i Wilayat*, the servant of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Perhaps the sword was ordered when the Shah moved his capital from Qazvin to Isphahan in 1598. It is still worn by the Raja of Mahmudabad during various ceremonies in Muharram or on days when the martyrdom of one of the Imams is commemorated. The sword is symbolic of a direct link between the wearer and the shrine of the Imam but is also a sign of the authority it bestows on the owner because of its belonging to the treasury of the Imam.

9 Original *sanad* document of the *Waqf-i Madrasa-i Ahmadiya* in the archives of the office of the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen.

nineteenth century and the next section will establish the ways in which close relationships were cultivated with the *'ulama* within India.

The Mahmudabad family could claim a high position within Sunni circles because they traced their ancestry back to the first Caliph Abu Bakr through his son Muhammad.[10] The family, indeed, followed the Sunni school of thought until the time of Nawab Muhammad Imam Khan (d. 1765). His younger son Mazhar 'Ali Khan was from Bilehra, which was a collateral branch of the Mahmudabad family. Mazhar 'Ali Khan's mother was a Shi'a. His father Muhammad Imam Khan was related to the Shaikhzadas of Lucknow through a marriage to the family of Shaikh Muhammad Mu'iz al-Din Khan.[11] At the invitation of the latter, Muhammad Imam Khan went and fought the Bangash Pathans in 1750. Nawab Mazhar 'Ali Khan's son, Nawab Amir 'Ali Khan had two sons: Raja Ibad 'Ali Khan of Bilehra and Raja Nawab 'Ali Khan (d. 1858). Nawab Mian Musahib 'Ali Khan of Mahmudabad (d. 1819) did not have children and so adopted Nawab 'Ali Khan, who was later known as Muqeem-ud-daula. Nawab 'Ali Khan's son Amir-ud-daula was married to the daughter of Sheikh Akbar Ali, the Taluqdar of Satrik (district Barabanki) who was the (Chamberlain) of the kitchens of Wajid 'Ali Shah. Until this generation the family married into other families with similar backgrounds and family histories. Their Sunni ancestors ensured that they had vast kinship networks and were related to families such as the Kidwais, Farooqis and Siddiqis.[12] However, the most important bloodline and also the most valued was that of the Prophet: after all, "family was an important source of identity, zealously maintained in family histories, most especially if claiming descent from the Prophet".[13] This status was even more cherished if the family happened to be members of the *'ulama*.

Marriage therefore was an important part of asserting one's identity and also declaring a kinship affiliation to other social groups, which in turn also resulted in stronger social and political ties. Marrying into a *sayyid* family was symbolically important because one could claim to have blood from the Prophet's family, although of course descent from the Prophet could not be

---

10 Shaikh 'Ali Hasan, *Tarikh-i Mahmudabad* (MS, Raja Mahmudabad Library, n.d.) Vol. 1, p. 2.

11 The Shaikhzadas of Lucknow including Shaikh Muhammad Mu'iz al-Din Khan are mentioned in A.H. Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, translated by E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Husain (London, 1975), pp. 43–44.

12 The Kidwais, Farooqis and Siddiqis were Sunni families in India who traced their ancestry back to clans in the Arabian Peninsula.

13 F. Robinson, "The British Empire and Muslim Identity in South Asia", *Transaction of the Royal History Society*, 8 (1998), p. 271.

claimed as this is patrilineal. One of the points that Ghazi ud-Din Haider made against the Mughal Emperors in trying to prove that he was their equal, if not better, was to underscore and emphasise his descent from the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim. Later he insisted on being given a daughter in marriage from the Mughal prince Sulaiman Shikoh who was resident in Lucknow. Marriage, therefore, is often recognition of identity and "the alliance created by marriage can vary considerably. Not all marriages unite equals. Indeed, marriages are often the acknowledgments of the superior status of one of the parties, usually the family of the groom".[14] In very rare cases however, this was not the case.

Amir-ud-daula's son, the Maharaja, married a *sayyid* woman, Zakia Begum from Kintur in Barabanki, a district in Awadh. She was from a family of traditional *'ulama* and descendent of Mufti Sayyid Muhammad Quli Khan whose knowledge of Arabic and the Islamic sciences was respected among Shi'i religious circles in Lucknow.[15] The family were Moussavi *sayyid*s and came originally from Nishapur, a town near the shrine city of Mashhad in Northeast Iran. Muhammad Quli Khan's son Sayyid Hamid Husain (1830–1888) was the author of *'Abaqat al-Anwar fi Imamat Aimat al-Athar*, a comprehensive history of the Shi'i faith as well as a voluminous study of Shi'i Traditions and theology.[16] The book was subsequently completed by his son Sayyid Nasir Husain and, to this day, is regarded as the pride of Shi'i theological work from India. Another family who had immigrated from Nishapur to Kintur was that of Sayyid Ahmad Moussavi Hindi, who was a contemporary and cousin of Hamid Husain. Sayyid Ahmad subsequently emigrated to Iraq in the 1830s and then back to Iran. He was the paternal grandfather of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.[17]

Hamid Husain was the paternal uncle of Karamat Husain and later also his guardian. Karamat Husain's father Siraj Husain was classically educated not only in the Islamic sciences but also in mathematics and English. Today Karamat Husain is remembered for his important work in developing women's education. The Maharaja met Karamat Husain in Allahabad after

[14] M.H. Fisher, "Political Marriage Alliances at the Shi'i Court of Awadh", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25, 4 (October 1983), p. 615.

[15] G. Minault, "Sayyid Karamat Husain and Education for Women", in *Lucknow: Memories of a City* (ed.) Violette Graff (Delhi, 1997), p. 155.

[16] A copy of this multi-volume book can be found in the archives of the Raja of Mahmudabad. The book was written in Farsi and is still un-translated and unstudied. The books have been published in Iran and Sayyid 'Ali Milani has written *Khulāsa-i 'Abaqāt al-Anwār*, as an abridged Arabic translation of the original.

[17] B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London, 1999), p. 2.

the latter had retired and "admitted that he [the Maharaja] had been wrong in the 1890s when he opposed founding a school for girls. Now, while he felt that Crosthwaite School was a very worthy cause, he nevertheless wanted to found a school in Lucknow that would be exclusively for Muslim girls".[18] Subsequently the Maharaja announced an endowment of 600 rupees per month and also donated the land on which the school was built and still stands. It is evident then that marriage also served as a method method of not only increasing someone's prestige through bloodlines but also of widening their circle of influence. In marrying Zakia Begum, the Maharaja not only ensured that his descendants would carry the blood of the *sayyid*s but also gain access to the world of scholars, jurists and bureaucrats. The marriage also meant kinship ties to extended family networks in Iran.

A magazine published to commemorate the death of Raja Amir Ahmad Khan in 1973 illustrates the important nature of this marriage. One of the leading articles includes an entire section called the '*maadari silsila*' or the maternal line that deals exclusively with the Raja's mother's family. The first sentence mentions the family's descent from the seventh Imam and then lists the accomplishments of her ancestors while mostly focusing on their scholarly works and books. The article goes on to say that "the respected lady [mother of the Raja] was the cousin [*humsheera*] of the author of *al-'Abaqat*, scholar [*'Allamah*] of his age, Seyed Hamid Husain *Sahib*".[19]

The Maharaja married both his two sons to two sisters from the collateral branch of the family in Bilehra. The two sisters, daughters of Raja Abul Hasan Khan, were orphaned at a young age and their brother died while he was still a child. Subsequently, the Raja married his two daughters into two prominent North Indian Shi'i Sayyid families. The eldest daughter, Maharajkumari Bibi Baqir-un-nissa, was married to Sayyid Reza Imam of the Imam family[20] from Patna and the younger daughter, Maharajkumari Bibi Sadiq-un-nissa, was married to Kunwar Sayyid Hasan Mehdi, son of Raja Sayyid Abu Ja'far of Pirpur.

Apart from marriage ties, members of the Mahmudabad family also had close connections with *'ulama* who were employed as their tutors and guardians. The Maharaja was taught the Qur'an from an early age by a gentleman who used to come to the entrance of the *zanana* (women's part of

18 Minault, "Sayyid Karamat Husain and Education for Women", p. 160.

19 Sa'adat Husain Khan, 'Amir ul-Umara' Raja Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan Sahib Marhom', *Al-Wa'iz*, 51, 12 (December 1973), p. 5.

20 Sir Ali Imam (1869–1932) was an eminent jurist and served as head of the Muslim League. His younger brother Sir Hasan Imam (1871–1933) was also an accomplished lawyer and at one time served as President of the Indian National Congress.

the house) because he was not allowed to leave its security. The Raja was educated both by Maulvi Sibte Hasan and his younger brother, Maulana Zafar Mehdi. The son of the former, Maulana Waris Hasan, would go on to be educated in Najaf and Karbala and then return to Lucknow to become the principal of the Madrasa'-ul Wa'izeen. Thus, we see that the *shurafa* not only maintained links with the *'ulama* through marriage but also through common involvement in and indeed ties to religious institutions, as shall be explored in the next section.

The '*ulama* and public institutions

Even before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Lucknow had long been a centre for religious studies. Both Shi'i and Sunni *madrasa*s and religious seminaries had established themselves with government patronage as well as patronage from the *shurafa* and *ru'osa* (wealthy classes). Shi'i scholars such as Maulvi Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi, whose family later came to be known as the Khandan-i Ijtihad, or the 'family of *ijtihad*', studied not only under various Shi'i *'ulama* but also went to lessons given by prominent Sunni *'ulama*, most notably belonging to the Firangi Mahal family. Although initially the Mahmudabad family supported the Aligarh movement, with Amir-ud-daula bequeathing an annual grant of 600 rupees through a *sanad* dated 24 July 1879,[21] this later gave way to disillusionment, and by 1908 there was a concerted movement by members of the Shi'i *'ulama* in Lucknow against Aligarh. A number of people debated amongst themselves the efficacy and indeed moral conundrum of propagating western education amongst Muslims. The Imamiya Conference, the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference and the Anjuman-i Sadr-ul Sudoor, which later became the All-India Shi'a Conference, all sought to try and impose a Shi'i framework on educational models and often these were dominated by the *'ulama*.[22] Not all *'ulama*, however, were opposed to introducing certain aspects of western education, prominent among these being Maulana Nasir Husain, a relative of Mahmudabad through marriage, a leading *mujtahid* of Lucknow and a cousin of Sayyid Karamat Husain.

On 19 May 1919, the Maharaja founded Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen through a registered *waqf* deed, as part of the *Waqf-i Madrasa-i Ahmadiya* of Mahmudabad.[23] The *madrasa* was established as an institution to provide

21 Selected Documents from the Aligarh Archives.

22 Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India*, pp. 153–165.

23 Registered *Waqf* Deed in Archives of the Office of the Board of Trustees, Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen.

Shi'i students with access to postgraduate study. The other important goal was to encourage *tabligh* (preaching), spreading awareness and correcting misrepresentations of the Shi'i *mazhab*, and to this end the *madrasa* sent many of its graduates to Africa, the Middle East and other parts of India. The Shi'a Conference celebrated the creation of the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen and passed a resolution to this effect.[24] The news of its establishment had an impact not only in Awadh and the north of India but also in the other great centre of Shi'ism, Hyderabad (Deccan). Maulvi Sayyid Ghulam Jabbar, a High Court judge there, publicly commended the Maharaja for "starting this work [founding the Madrasa] which is of paramount importance for the Shi'i *mazhab*".[25]

The Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen was established at a time when Shi'i institutions were increasing in number.[26] This trend continued into the 1920s and 1930s with the creation of the Imamiya Mission, founded by Maulana Sayyid 'Ali Naqi, and the Tanzim-ul Momineen, headed by retired Judge Asghar Hussain and a lawyer from Patna, Sultan Ahmad and newspapers such as *Sarfaraz*, *Asad* and *Akhbar-i Imamiya* gained circulation. Although Minault and Lelyveld contend that the Maharaja was not involved in, and indeed distanced himself from the Shi'a College,[27] it seems that they overlooked the fact that two of the main founders of the Shi'a College were the Raja's close relatives. The Raja of Pirpur and Maulana Nasir Husain Kinturi had the covert material and moral support of the Maharaja in their project.[28] The other prominent founder, Nawab Fateh 'Ali Khan Qizilbash, was also a Shi'i *ta'luqdar* from Nawabganj and therefore formed part of the small clique of Shi'i *ta'luqdar*s in Awadh. The Maharaja's open support for such an institution would have damaged his national standing, particularly amongst League members. In this way, the Maharaja avoided the fate of Badr-ud-din Tyabji, a founder of the Anjuman-i-Islam in Bombay, who was lambasted by the Muslim community for being pro-Congress, a 'failing' that in turn was ascribed to the fact that Tyabji was a Sulaimani Bohra. In a *The Times of India* editorial, Khan Bahadur Haider Qassam took it upon himself "to expose their [Badr-ud-din and his brother Qamar-ud-din] pretentious

---

24 Original statement by the Secretary of the All India Shi'a Conference, Sayyid Amir Hasan Forogh Lucknawi, *Shia College News* (Lucknow), 23 January 1920, p. 1.

25 *Shi'a College News* (Lucknow), 9 January 1920, p. 2.

26 Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India*, pp. 115–125.

27 G. Minault and D. Lelyveld, "The Campaign for a Muslim University, 1898–1920", *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 3 (1984), p. 184.

28 Raja Muhammad Amir Muhammad Khan of Mahmudabad, interview, 20 December 2009.

arrogance" in trying to become leaders of the Muslim community when the numbers of Sulaimani Bohras in India were "infinitesimally small".[29] Tyabji's staunchly pro-Congress position was opposed not only by leading Sunnis like Sir Sayyid but also by Twelver Shi'as, most importantly Ameer 'Ali.[30]

The structure of the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen was innovative in that it did not solely give administrative power to the *'ulama*. The Board of Trustees stipulated a permanent executive place for the descendent of the Maharaja of Mahmudabad (the Musnad Nashin or, the current Raja), two members chosen by the Raja including another family member, a lawyer and two members of the *'ulama* one of whom would be the *Imam-e Jum'a* (leader of the Friday prayers) of Muhmudabad. The balancing of the power of the *'ulama* was reflected in the people who delivered keynote speeches on the Madrasa's inaugural day:[31] Maulana Najm ul-Hasan 'Mujtahid', Maulana Nasir Husain Kinturi 'Mujtahid', Maulana Sibt-e Hasan 'Mujtahid', Raja, Maulvi Abu Ja'far Khan, the Raja of Pirpur, Khan Bahadur Sayyid Tawakkul Husain, the *ta'luqdar* of Lorepur, Sayyid Wazir Hasan and Sayyid Asghar Husain, a judge in the High Court, all shared the stand. Many of these men had ties of kinship, most notably Nasir Husain and the Maharaja. Maulana Najm ul-Hasan was a student and son-in-law of Mufti Muhammad 'Abbas Shustari al-Jaza'iri who was also the teacher of Maulana Hamid Husain Kinturi, who was mentioned earlier and was the grandfather of Nasir Husain. The Rajas of Pirpur and Lorepur were relatives of Mahmudabad. Although members of the *'ulama*, *shurafa* and *ru'osa* were distinguishable amongst this group of people, they were all part of a tight-knit group whose members were either related to each other through marriage or had deep links because of a shared intellectual tradition.

Al-Wa'iz and *The Muslim Review*: Local nodes of a global network

Following the creation of the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen, the Maharaja founded *Al-Wa'iz*, an Urdu periodical, in 1921 that dealt mostly with theological, jurisprudential and historical questions pertaining to Shi'ism. Its English-language monthly counterpart, *The Muslim Review*, was founded in 1927

29 M. Karlitzky, "The Tyabji Clan- Urdu as a Symbol of Group Identity", *La Sapienza* (University of Rome, n.d.), p. 191, http://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/8484987/kgoqyr (accessed 21 April 2013).

30 M.Y. Abbasi, *Muslim Politics and Leadership in South Asia 1876–92* (Islamabad, 1981), p. 31.

31 Records found in the archives of the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen in the Office of the Board of Trustees.

and was also published by the *madrasa*. Despite being published under the auspices of an institution of learning, it is interesting that *The Muslim Review* was also used to propagate political ideas. In analysing a selection of editions published between 1927 and 1950, it seems that there were three areas with which the editors were constantly engaged: Shiʿism, both historical and contemporary; the global Muslim community; and national Indian politics.[32] The following section illustrates the ways in which the Madrasa was utilised in order to engage with three distinct issues: transnational Shiʿism, local Indian politics and the wider Muslim world. Furthermore, the magazines can be seen as mechanisms that built upon older networks and, indeed, because of their very nature served to expand these networks too.

i. *Print and preaching*

By the beginning of the twentieth century, printing and publishing had sparked the creation of a number of periodicals and newspapers, which in turn created a medium through which "scholars, whether old or new. . . interacted with each other across the Islamic world".[33] The Madrasa'tul Waʿizeen also set up a press in 1923 which subsequently published books written by the *ʿulama* and also by other Shiʿi intellectuals. The *Al-Waʿiz* Safdar Press provided a forum through which a multifaceted discussion could take place. This section illustrates how the *madrasa* participated and reported on its interaction with the transnational Shiʿi world. The Urdu language magazine *Al-Waʿiz* was founded in 1921 and from its inception was edited by members of the *ʿulama*. Unlike its English counterpart *The Muslim Review*, which was founded in 1927, *Al-Waʿiz* focused mostly on theological, jurisprudential questions or those matters that pertained to the Shiʿi community. In 1922 the first *muballigheen* (preachers) were dispatched to various parts of India and abroad in order to spread the faith and counter the misinformation that they believed was being spread about Shiʿism. The magazine served as a

[32] Although five people constitute the Board of Trustees, the registered *waqf* deed stipulates that the chairman and the managing trustee must be the person who occupies the Mahmudabad *masnad*, or 'seat'. The Maharaja made decisions pertaining to the day-to-day running of the *madrasa* directly or through an authorised deputy and therefore it is assumed that the views expressed in articles in *The Muslim Review* were also espoused by the Maharaja. See the *waqf* deed present in the office of the secretary to the Board of Trustees in Madrasa'tul Waʿizeen. As shall be illustrated later, after 1947 the Maharaja's younger brother Maharaj Kumar Amir Haider Khan was the involved in the day running of the madrasa and also edited the magazines.

[33] F. Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 56.

way of reporting on the activities of the young men who were sent abroad. *Tabligh* was conceived as a religious obligation, and so a journey to carry out preaching was in a way a symbolic pilgrimage.[34]

Maulana Anwar Husain, a young cleric, lived and travelled around Africa,[35] Maulvi Kifayat Husain went to Rangoon "on the request of believers there",[36] and then later on to Basra in Iraq, while Maulvi Sayyid ʻAli preached in Madagascar, Mogadishu, Mombasa and Aden.[37] Closer to home, Maulana Javed Husain was sent to Multan and Sayyid Mumtaz Husain went to Kathiawar.[38] The network of preachers gradually expanded so much so that in 1931 Maulana H. Din, founder of the Jamʻiyat-ul-Ittihad wa Taraqqi-ul-Islam in Sierra Leone, wrote a long letter to Maulana Haidari, who was referred to as a "missionary" in the *madrasa*. H. Din complained about the advent of the Qadianis [or Ahmadiya[39] movement] in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The sect was seen as deviant by both Sunni and Shiʻi *ʻulama* and therefore such an appeal would have been taken all the more seriously. H. Din accordingly prayed that "your noble institution would come to our aid in our feeble efforts in the cause of Islam by establishing your Branch Mission in Sierra Leone, and thus save the situation".[40]

The links with Shiʻi institutions abroad had been initiated as early as during Amir-ud-daula's trip to Iraq in 1888. Thus in 1922, when the body of his wife was sent in a funeral cortege to Karbala to be buried next to the shrines there, a number of the most prominent *ʻulama* attended the burial. Shaikh ʻAli Hasan, who accompanied the cortege, made arrangements for the participation of nearly 1,500 people.[41] In order to ensure that no trouble would arise, the Shaikh went personally to invite the *killidar*s, or 'key keepers', of

---

34 The increasing need felt by certain Muslim groups to send missionaries or preachers out to 'spread the faith' seems to have been very much characteristic of the time. Just four years later, Muhammad Ilyas founded the *Tablighi Jamaʻat*, which perhaps most openly reflected such efforts at proselytisation. See K. M. Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jamaʻat as a transnational Islamic movement for faith renewal* (Leiden, 2000).

35 Report in *Al-Waʻiz* (Lucknow), 22, 55, Nov 1942, pp. 2–3.

36 Report in *Al-Waʻiz* (Lucknow), 1, 2, Oct 1921, p. 2.

37 Report in *Al-Waʻiz* (Lucknow), 5, 7, March 1926, p. 6.

38 Report in *Al-Waʻiz* (Lucknow), 22, 55, Nov 1942, pp. 2–3.

39 A nineteenth-century sect, whose founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), claimed to be the awaited Messiah and a prophet of Islam.

40 Letter from H. Din to L. A. Haideri, *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 3 and 8 March 1931, pp. 16–20.

41 *Dhamima-i Tarikh-i Mahmudabad yaʻni safarnama-i ʻatabat-i ʻaliyat*, 1922, Travel Diary compiled by ʻAli Hasan, p. 180.

the shrine and its treasury. The *killidar*s, who were politically very powerful,[42] promised to participate in the procession near the shrine.[43] Chief among the *'ulama* who participated in the funeral was Ayatollah Zain al-'Abideen al-Mazenderani, who arrived with thirty students and, as mentioned earlier, was one of the chief recipients of the Oudh Bequest.[44]

Indeed, *The Muslim Review* dealt extensively with the Bequest, detailing the various payments and outstanding amounts that were paid to people in Iraq and Iran as well as the monies used to build infrastructure, such as the canal connecting Najaf to the Euphrates, which was financed by Nawab Asif-ud-daula and Nawab Sa'adat 'Ali Khan of Auradh on the recommendation of Maulana Dildar 'Ali.[45] Additionally it consistently provided news of Shi'i political organisations in India and abroad. Although non-sectarian in its approach, the magazine periodically reported on the activities of the All-India Shi'a Conference and also encouraged the support of Shi'i organisations like the orphanage and hospital.[46] In reporting on the proceedings of Muharram in Rampur State, for instance, the participation and recitation of *Wa'iz* Maulana Sibte Hasan was underscored before "His Highness himself performed the ceremony at the Imambara". The title *Wa'iz* was used to denote a graduate of the *madrasa* and illustrates not just how inter-regional contacts and exchanges were facilitated by the *madrasa*, but also emphasises the importance of the *madrasa*'s graduates who were called to the premier Shi'i states in order to read *majali*s.

To increase the *madrasa*'s prestige, not only amongst ordinary Shi'as but also amongst the *'ulama*, its missionary and publishing sections were patronised by a highly-respected member of the *'ulama*. Sayyid Najm-ul Hasan (1863–1938) was a prominent *'alim* and the founder of the Nazimiya Madrasa in Lucknow. The Raja used to refer to him as '*Dada*' (grandfather).[47] It has been demonstrated by many scholars that the *'ulama* at this time tended not only to be part of an elite in their own societies, but were also

[42] In more recent history, the reader will remember the murder of Saiyid 'Abdul Majid al-Khoe'i on his return to Najaf in 2003. Al-Khoe'i had gone to meet the *killidar* of the shrine from Saddam's era and the crowd which later lynched both men had initially wanted al-Khoe'i to hand over Haider ar-Rufai'i, whose family had a long tradition of being the key keepers of the shrine.

[43] *Dhamima-i Tarikh-i Mahmudabad*, p. 181.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 186.

[45] "The Oudh Bequest", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 2, 3, March 1928, pp. 29–34.

[46] *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 2, 3, March 1928, p. 61.

[47] "His Holiness Najmul 'ulama", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 30, 4–5, April and May 1941, p. iii.

members of a transnational elite. The Maulana was the student and son-in-law of Muhammad ʻAbbas Shusturi, an Arab *ʻalim*, who also taught Maulana Hamid Husain Kinturi as mentioned earlier. Thus, we see that by marrying into a family of *ʻulama*, the Maharaja had extended his network beyond that of the landed elite to that of the *ʻulama* and scholars, which, in turn, assisted the creation and running of religious institutions. Nearly all editions of both the Urdu and English language magazines carried small advertisements announcing the Maulana's patronage of the Madrasa't ul-Waʻizeen for "the missionaries" good work in Zanzibar, Uganda, Mombasa, Darussalam, Singapore, Shanghai, &c'.[48]

ii. *Muslim views, national politics*

Despite being a religious monthly, *The Muslim Review* assumed a strong position on what was often called "the communal problem of India".[49] Apart from the occasional article about some aspect of Hindu Law, or about potential areas of reconciliation between Muslims and Hindus, it seems that the magazine took up two major strands of political thought. The first was a friendly yet wary engagement with Gandhi's politics, and the second a more open and frank support of Ambedkar's views. The distrust that many members of the Muslim League had developed for Nehru was evident in their gradual disengagement from him. But these personal connections were maintained by the next generation and Jawaharlal Nehru often visited the Raja at Butler Palace and Mahmudabad House in Lucknow.

Perhaps one of the most notable events of the Maharaja's political career was his Chairmanship of the Lucknow Joint session of the All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress in 1916. The Maharaja, like Dr M. A. Ansari, had at one time been a member of both the League and the Congress and therefore was especially concerned with a rapprochement between the two. The result of the session was interestingly referred to as the "Hindu-Muslim" pact by *The Muslim Review*.[50] The session was held in Mahmudabad House in Lucknow. The Maharaja had developed close relations with Motilal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and other Congress leaders

[48] For example please refer to the back inside cover of *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 8, 5, May 1931.

[49] Indeed, the importance of this was later made clear when the first chapter of *The Pirpur Report* dealt specifically with this issue. See Raja Sayyid Muhammad Mehdi of Pirpur, *Report of the Inquiry Committee appointed by The Council of the All India Muslim League to Inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces* (Lucknow, 1938).

[50] *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 8, 5, May 1931, p. 49.

while he was in the Viceroy's Council (1906–1917) in the pre-First World War years, and his "association with other India political leaders in that body provided a basis for subsequent Congress-League co-operation".[51] This experience had also ensured that the Maharaja's politics were generally conciliatory without compromising Muslim interests. In his presidential address to a special session of the Muslim League in Bombay in 1918, the Maharaja referred to the Congress as the League's "sister organisation"[52] and went on to describe the amicable agreement that had been reached at this event, only to be later scuppered by the 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The speeches of the Maharaja also showed that he was keenly aware of, and made links between, international events and the League's actions:

> The manner in which your organisation represented feeling during the period of the Tripolitan and the Balkan wars, at the time of the sacrilege of the shrine at Mashhed, the honourable part it played in the crises created by the Cawnpore mosque affair, coupled more recently with its truly statesmanlike action in taking the initiative in acquainting the Government with the current Mohammedan feelings with regard to the question of the Caliphate … are chapters in its history of which the All-India Muslim League may well be proud.[53]

Indeed, this particular quote aptly illustrates the various identities - Indian, Muslim, Shi'a - which the Maharaja was balancing, and furthermore shows how he sought to occupy a neutral ground by touching on subjects that mattered to all the various factions of the League without compromising the League's "reasoned loyalty to His Majesty the King Emperor".[54]

It seems *The Muslim Review* also acted as a mouthpiece for the positions that the family took in nationalist politics and this is perhaps most clearly illustrated by a series of articles about Gandhi and Ambedkar. In an editorial by the chief editor of the magazine, Sayyid 'Abid Hasan Naqvi, Gandhi's politics are viewed through a distinctly Shi'i lens. Indeed, even the non-violence espoused by him was understood as a continuation of the policy of the second Imam, Hasan ibn 'Ali, of quiescence and non-violent disagreement. The editor praises Gandhi for being a "staunch Unitarian"

---

51 D. Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920–1932* (Delhi, 1982), p. 15.

52 A. M. Zaidi, *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India Vol. 2: Sectarian Nationalism and the Khilafat* (New Delhi, 1975), p. 99.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

and his sincere effort "to emancipate India from political subjugation".[55] He is then lambasted, however, for playing into the hands of *pandit*s on account of his indefinite fast in support of untouchables being acknowledged as Hindus. His insistence was seen as nothing more than an effort to increase the numerical superiority of Hindus albeit with good intentions. The author, in keeping with *tabligh*, the main aim of the *madrasa*, then went on to invite Gandhi to "put off the cloak of Hinduism and please . . . accept Islam".[56] In an interview in another edition the journalist was pleased when Gandhi replied that he "believed in One God" and also thought that Muhammad's teaching provided "a comprehensive message of the Kingdom of God" that "no other religious teacher gave".[57] The interviewer, a Shi'a named Karamali Abdul 'Ali from Bombay, proceeded to ask Gandhi why he did not recite the *kalima*,[58] to which Gandhi almost comically replied, "I read the *kalima* at all times and can read it now also". He then proceeded to recite the declaration but ended it by saying "but it cannot change my caste. I am a *Bania*, you know".[59] Although this statement is ostensibly in jest it also reveals the deep unease that many Muslims had developed with Gandhi's perceived syncreticism. The Wardha Scheme and campaign for Hindustani as opposed to Urdu made it clear that "at least to [sic] Gandhi's mind, [Hindustani] was something quite different from Urdu".[60] In a reply to an article in *The Times of India* in which Gandhi stated that "India wants Ram Raj . . . The present is the age of democracy . . . My democracy is depicted in the Ramayan . . . In such a raj even a dog cannot be wronged",[61] the editors of *The Muslim Review* wrote a scathing reply and ended by emphatically stating that "we Muslims, perhaps with the exception of a few Congressite Muslims, can never idealise the Ram Raj as depicted by Gandhiji".[62] So Gandhi was viewed not so much as someone who was inimical to Muslim interests, even drawing praise for "his virtues, his services,

55 S. A. H. Naqavi, "An Appeal to Gandhiji", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 26, 1, January 1940, p. 39.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Interview, *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 19, 4, October 1936.

58 The declaration that is recited when converting to Islam.

59 Interview, *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 19, 4, October 1936.

60 Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan, 'Some Memories', in *The Partition of India*, (eds.) H.C. Phillips and M. D. Wainwright (Aberdeen, 1970), p. 387. Please also refer to the *Pirpur Report* for a more detailed discussion of the differences between Congress leaders on the language issue, see Raja Sayyid Mohamad Mehdi of Pirpur, *Report of the Inquiry Committee*, pp. 28–36.

61 *The Times of India*, Mail Edition, 4 February, 1928, p. 4.

62 Naqavi, "An Appeal to Gandhiji", p. 23.

his sacrifices, his indomitable spirit",[63] but rather as a leader who had let the Muslims down by his insistence on "the compulsion to sing Bande Mataram in school . . . the insistence on retaining the Hindu symbol of the lotus and the Muslim Mass Contact scheme".[64] The magazine's point of view, in large part, reflected the opinions of the Raja who was managing trustee at this time and was active in the Working Committee of the Muslim League. The Raja's gradual shift into the League and its politics had not always been certain, and in his *Memoirs* he explained his decision:

> With all my nationalistic tendencies and my association with Congress and other progressive political workers and leaders some of whom I personally knew and admired, I might have joined the Congress. But my enthusiasm cooled when to my great disappointment I found that instead of trying to understand the League politics, Jawaharlal Nehru showed nothing but contempt for the Muslim League and its leader to whom I had given undivided loyalty.[65]

The anti-Muslim polemics of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and other members Congress Party and opposition to the Vidya Mandir scheme in Nagpur and the Wardha Scheme all over India further catalysed the Raja's drift away from the Congress Party.

Ambedkar, on the other hand, was viewed as someone who echoed the views of Muslims in India. *The Muslim Review* frequently reprinted Ambedkar's various articles and gave prominence to one such article entitled 'Abolish Hinduism' which was advertised on the cover page.[66] Perhaps Ambedkar endeared himself to Muslims because he too spoke of a "united India" and also acknowledged that he was not against Pakistan for "it is founded on the principle of self-determination, which it is now too late to question".[67] The Maharaja in his last speech in 1928 had also realised that "at no time in the history of India, was there a call for unity more insistent than there is now".[68] Gandhi had become very influential in the 1920s due to his involvement in the Khilafat movement and therefore to some extent overshadowed the Muslim

---

63 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

65 Khan, "Some Memories", p. 386.

66 B. R. Ambedkar, "Abolish Hinduism", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 19, 2, August 1936, pp. 36–41.

67 B. R. Ambedkar, *Words of Freedom: Ideas of a Nation* (New Delhi, 2010), p. 55.

68 Speech to the 20th session of the All India Muslim League, Calcutta, 26–30 December 1928, in A. M. Zaidi, *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India, Vol 3: Parting of Ways* (New Delhi, 1975), p. 116.

League. Perhaps this was another reason why leaders of the Muslim League were uncomfortable with his politics. The Mahmudabads, and therefore the staff at *The Muslim Review*, had even more reason to be uncomfortable because of Gandhi's proximity to the Sunni leader 'Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal with whom the Maharaja had disagreed in 1919.

iii. *Cultural pan-Islamism*

In the aftermath of the First World War, it seems that the editors were deeply involved in reflecting on the place of Indian Muslims within the larger Muslim *umma*. The editors engaged with pan-Islamism in a highly critical manner, and disagreed with Afghani's theories concerning a global political movement that would bring together "the organisation of the entire Muslim world". While rejecting any impulse towards a political movement, a "cultural Pan-Islamism" was encouraged in order "to distinguish between the very genuine cultural unity as between the various Muslim races of the world, and the bogey of political militant Pan-Islamism set up by Western Imperialists in order to foster anti-Muslim sentiment".[69] The Maharaja, who lamented the fact that the question of the Caliphate in Turkey had become "a shuttle-cock for European diplomacy to play with",[70] echoed this sentiment in a speech during a session of the Muslim League. Thus, questions pertaining to the Muslims of India, although a part of "the Muslim brotherhood", had to be seen from "the point of view of the Mohammedans in India",[71] reinforcing Robinson's argument that "Muslims made their pan-Islamic identity subordinate to a Muslim national identity".[72] Pan-Arabism as a political movement was similarly regarded as a pipe dream:

> We do not think that pan-Arabism, in the shape of a definite political confederation of Arab States is a practical possibility, any more than pan-Islamism in the shape of a confederation of Muslim States; just as we believe in cultural Pan-Islamism, we thing that a cultural and possibly economic entente between various Arab countries and races would be most desirable, and indeed beneficial.[73]

---

[69] "Pan-Islamism", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 8, 3, March 1931, pp. 48–51.

[70] Address to 10th Session of the All-India Muslim League, Calcutta, 30 Dec 1917- 1 Jan 1918, in A. M. Zaidi, *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India Vol. 2: Sectarian Nationalism and the Khilafat*, (New Delhi, 1975), p. 73.

[71] Presidential Address to a Special Session of the All-India Muslim League in Bombay, 31 Aug - Sept 1918 in Zaidi, *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought*, p. 111.

[72] Robinson. *Separatism among Indian Muslims*, p. 135.

[73] "Syria and the Pan-Arab Movement", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 9, 2, Aug 1931, p. 43.

Perhaps it was with a view to supporting this cultural global movement that by the late-1930s the editorial board contained international associate editors: Dr Baron Omar Rolf Ehrenfelds in Vienna, Harry E. Heinkel in America, Dr. M. A. Salmin in Bombay and Prof. Dr Fritz Krenko in England. A number of issues gave synopses of various Muslim countries and even organisations abroad. The editors were profoundly saddened by the "resignation of Sir Hubert Stewart Rankin from the presidentship [sic] of the British Muslim Society". By 1940 *The Muslim Review* described the magazine as "The Only Advocate of Old Islam", and printed this beneath the title on the coverage. This may have been an effort to increase legitimacy in the eyes of the Sunni majority and counter the rapidly growing Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia, which was intrinsically opposed to Shi'i Islam. It is of note that although the magazine shunned any sectarian bias against Sunnis, it actively opposed the Wahhabi school of thought. One of Wahhabism's key criticisms of Shi'ism is that the latter indulges in *bid'a* (innovation). In an article entitled 'Innovations in Hejaz', the editor reported that the kingdom was "introducing many innovations" because the king had signed contracts with a British company to establish wireless stations: indeed, "Wahabism in Arabia seemed to be in direct negation to every tendency, which was making headway in the other Muslim lands". The solution, as proposed by the magazine, to the political problems faced by Muslims was defining and creating "Muslim national self-governing units",[74] which was not dissimilar to the scheme proposed by Iqbal in his *The Reconstruction of Islamic Political Thought* whereby he encouraged Muslims to look inward and nurture nationalism until these separate units were powerful enough to merge together.[75]

We see then that *The Muslim Review* was not only a religious magazine but also a mouthpiece for the political opinions of the Mahmudabad family. Shi'i identity was subordinated, but by no means ignored to create a national unity in the face of the colonial power. In an editorial, Shi'as – "in this age of general disruptance [sic]" - were encouraged to "assert their existence as a political community and therefore have all the sympathies of the Muslims and the Muslim League and work shoulder to shoulder to combat the aggressive

74 "Islam and the Present War", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 30, 4–5, April and May 1941, p. 44.

75 M. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930, reprint Lahore, 2006), pp. 126–130.

onslaughts of the Congress".[76] Although Shiʿism was a necessary determinant of politics, it was never the overriding factor for the Mahmudabad family:

> Some of the greatest leaders of Islamic modernism have been Shiʿi in the technical sense: Amir ʿAli, Seyedayn, and others. Jinnah, also, is a Shiʿi, and many of the Leagues least dispensable figures: *eg*., the Rajas of Mahmudabad and Pirpur. But these men have functioned not *qua* Shiʿi but *qua* Muslim.[77]

But while Cantwell Smith was perceptive in realising that the audiences that were being addressed were Muslim and not simply limited to the Shiʿa, it would probably be too simplistic and reductionist to say that these men *only* functioned '*qua* Muslim'. It is evident, for instance, from their writings that often the language used by them, and the ideas expressed therein, were rooted in Shiʿi theological and historical discourse. Furthermore, it is evident that although their Shiʿi identity formed the basis of their worldview, it did not lead to a myopic understanding of politics. Shiʿas themselves were divided in their support for the Muslim League. Most notably the Maharaja's younger son, Maharajkumar Muhammad Amir Haider Khan, almost presciently, given the current state of affairs in Pakistan, was staunchly opposed to Shiʿi involvement in the Muslim League. Jinnah wrote to him that he was "sorry that your [Maharajkumar's] mind is still working in the direction which is not likely to benefit Shias . . . You will forgive me if I do not see eye to eye with you. The proper policy for the Shia is to join the Muslim League wholeheartedly".[78] The editors of *The Muslim Review* hoped that "the Maharaj Kumar Sahib would prove himself to be the Reza Shah of the Shiʿas of India", due to his work for "the scattered forces of his fraternity".[79] Interestingly, the Maharajkumar's participation in the All India Shiʿa Conference was not seen as antagonistic towards the policies of his brother.[80] After Partition, the Maharajkumar chose to stay in India and wrote "I have not yet gone to Pakistan and have no intention of going to Pakistan".[81] In another letter to his tutor, J. A. Chapman, he explained that he would do everything he could to prevent the fate of Indian Muslims being that of the Moors in Spain.[82]

76 "Editorial Note", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 26, 3, March 1940, p. 57.

77 W. Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (Lahore, 1946), p. 345.

78 Letter from Jinnah to Maharajkumar, 8 April 1940, in S. I. Husain, *The Life and Times of Raja Saheb Mahmudabad* (Lahore, 1990), pp. 263–264.

79 "Editorial Note", *The Muslim Review* (Lucknow), 16, 1, Jan 1940, p. 50.

80 *Ibid*.

81 Letter from Maharajkumar to Chapman, 27 March 1949, in 'Letters from Naboo', Chapman Papers, p. 374, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

82 *Ibid*., p. 349.

The Raja also chose not to go to Pakistan and in August 1947 he crossed over from Quetta to Zahedan in Iran with his family on a Dakota plane, "broken by the experience that Partition turned out to be".[83] From Iran he continued on to Karbala and settled for some time in the shrine city, which is part of Shi'ism's most sacred geography. While the Raja settled in Karbala, his younger brother, the Maharajkumar, as the *Mutawalli-e Muntazim* (Managing Trustee), took over the day-to-day running of the *madrasa* after 1947.[84]

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important argument that this article seeks to make is that, despite being members of a "double minority", prominent Indian Shi'as successfully maintained, negotiated and built upon their local, national and transnational networks in order to continue engaging with the social, religious and political requirements of the time. Specifically, the three aforementioned networks have been charted through the tropes of marriage and kinship, ideology and the importance of printing. These linkages have been mostly explored by analysing the patronage of educational institutions. The exploration of marriage and kinship patterns sheds light on how members of the Shi'i community viewed themselves and their future for "marriage expresses a mutual recognition of some degree of shared identity".[85] These relationships, most often to the world of the *'ulama*, helped facilitate new ways of engaging with the Shi'i community and also led to the creation of educational institutions like the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen, which was set up as a religious seminary but also came to serve as a political platform, with its magazines serving as a method of spreading the political views, prose and poetry of both the Maharaja and the Raja.

These new marital connections to the world of the *'ulama* in part support the argument for a move away from what could be seen as a more "establishment Shi'ism" of Nawabi nobility to "something of an elemental redefinition".[86] The Maharaja's marriage to Zakia Begum illustrates this shift

83 G. Pandey, "Can a Muslim be Indian?", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41, 4 (Oct 1999), p. 617.

84 The Raja was an Indian national until 1957 when he became a Pakistani citizen. The Raja's Wif Rani Kaniz Abid of Bilehra (1910–1991) and his only son Mohammad Amir Mohammad Khan (b. 1943) stayed on in India thus providing another example of the way in which many families were desided because of partition.

85 Fisher, "Political marriage alliances", p. 593.

86 Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India*, pp. 19–20, 225–226.

to some extent and furthermore his founding of the Madrasa as a hub for *tabligh* demonstrates a willingness to engage with the exigencies of the time without being hindered by tradition.

Using the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen and its publishing organs as an example, this article has also sought to illustrate Minault and Lelyveld's arguments concerning "the confluence of education and politics in modern India".[87] The example that Minault uses in arguments is that of the campaign for a Muslim University in Aligarh. The creation of the *madrasa*, an institution founded for and dedicated to the dissemination of Shi'i thoughts and ideas, also provides an interesting example for understanding how the Maharaja might have viewed politics. In particular, we see the ways in which the Urdu and English magazines were utilised, to a large extent, to deal with different issues, which in turn facilitated the simultaneous inhabitation of several public spheres. In all the copies of *Al-Wa'iz* and *The Muslim Review* that have been examined, the common anti-Sunni polemics were notably absent, and at most the editors occasionally criticised Wahhabis for deviating from Islam. This example can perhaps act as a counterweight to Justin Jones's argument that the Shi'a tended towards a distinct, separate (*alehda*) and inward-looking identity.[88] While the experience of one family may not be symptomatic of the wider community, it does illustrate how there was also an attempt by traditional Shi'i institutions at creating bridges not only domestically but also transnationally. *The Muslim Review* published regular contributions from leading Sunni writers, some of who also sat on the editorial board. Simultaneously the *madrasa* was training young clerics to preach in Africa, the Far East and other areas of India, thus highlighting that even this ostensibly religious institution, while in overall terms guided by the precepts of Shi'ism, had many internal sub-narratives.

It is evident that the Mahmudabad family worked towards making the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen a local hub of a network that spread its nodes both domestically and internationally. More importantly, the intra-community links of marriage and kinship facilitated this flow of ideas, information and people. The importance of religion in shaping the world-view of Indian Shi'as in general and "the lived experience" of the Mahmudabad family specifically is illustrated by the marriage and kinship patterns of the clan. Political ties were often also cemented by ties of marriage not only amongst other *ashraf* families such as the Imam family of Patna or the family of the Raja of Pirpur but

87 Minault and Lelyveld, "The Campaign for a Muslim University, 1898–1920", p. 145.

88 Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India*, pp. 114–146.

also with members of the *'ulama*. These links, as we saw with the Maharaja's marriage to a daughter of the Kintur family, not only provided links with *'ulama* who participated in the creation of institutions like the Madrasa't-ul Wa'izeen, but also established links with *'ulama* interests.

Analysis of all three spheres - the local, national and the transnational - makes it possible to argue that these often mutually reinforced each other. It is also possible to argue that the family dealt with various ecumenes in different ways. For instance, the content of *Al-Wa'iz* magazine was mostly aimed at a national and transnational religious audience while *The Muslim Review* tended to focus more on the national and international political issues of the time. However, both magazines overlapped in trying to create a new space for Shi'ism by arguing for a form of 'cultural pan-Islamism', which resulted in prominent Shi'as like Jamal-ud-din Afghani and Sayyid Amir 'Ali, apart from the Mahmudabads, abrogating their minority status and becoming a part of the discourse of a wider cross-section of Muslim society. This tendency to talk 'qua Muslim' rather than 'qua Shi'a' as Cantwell Smith stated also meant that the creation of the *madrasa* for the purposes of *tabligh* was not at odds with the involvement of the Maharaja and the Raja in nationalist politics. It is evident, then, that an ever evolving and intertwining set of relationships populated the identity of the Mahmudabad family, that drew upon their kinship ties, political links and their associations with religious institutions.

4 Shiʿism, Humanity and Revolution in Twentieth-century India
Selfhood and Politics in the Husainology of ʿAli Naqi Naqvi

Justin Jones

Karbala's multiple readings: Imam Husain and the Imamiya Mission in 1930s-1940s India

The martyrdom of the third Shiʿi Imam, Husain ibn ʿAli, at the hands of the army of the ʿUmayyad Caliph Yazid on the plains of Karbala in 61AH is an event that has continued to inform and influence the lives of the world's Shiʿi peoples and societies. For South Asia, studies abound of Muharram, the ritualised commemorations of the martyrdom of Husain and his family. Its practices of mourning and sermonising have been portrayed as sectarian markers by which the Shiʿa have distinguished or even isolated themselves from other communities; or, conversely and perhaps slightly contradictorily, as part of a wider South Asian culture of cross-confessional religious participation within which the Indian Shiʿa have been able to abrogate their minority status.[1] However, the overwhelming focus in such studies upon the social location and ritual particulars of Muharram has meant that sometimes the actual ideas and meanings derived from Karbala have remained comparatively obscure.[2] As conveyed in Michael Fischer's highly

---

My thanks to Mustafa Husain Asif Ja'isi and to the Azad and Shiʿi Diniyat Libraries, Aligarh, for providing me with access to most of the texts on which this article is based.

1 For two examples of many studies that have focused on the ritual observance of Muharram in South Asia, see David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim devotional life in India* (New York, 2001), and Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shiʿi Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, 1993).

2 An important recent exception to this, and one engaged throughout this article, is Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York, 2006). For other works which have explored the diversity and nuances of meaning within the Karbala message, see Ayatullah Mahmud Taleqani, Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari and Ali Shariʿati,

influential work on Iranian Shi'ism, the Karbala story has always existed not as a static message but as a 'paradigm', a highly adaptable construct able to absorb and project a variety of values and meanings depending on its contexts of transmission and reception.[3] Indeed, while different South Asian religious communities have always interpreted the message of Karbala with variant emphases, it is important to remember that the story of Imam Husain's martyrdom has always carried 'multiple readings' even within Shi'ism itself.[4]

This article is an attempt to focus on the esoteric meanings rather than exoteric expressions of the Karbala tragedy in South Asia, through a focus upon what one scholar has termed "Husainology": the particular interpretation of the attributes assigned to the third Imam, and the basis of his significance for modern believers.[5] The focus here is the distinctive Husainology pioneered from the 1930s onwards by arguably the most influential Shi'i scholar of twentieth-century South Asia: the *mujtahid* Sayyid 'Ali Naqi Naqvi (1905–1988; often colloquially known as Naqqan Sahib). A descendant of the seminal 'Khandan-i Ijtihad' scholarly household of Lucknow comprised of the descendants of Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi[6], he is seen by many as South Asia's final great *mujtahid*. Spending much of his childhood in Iraq, and educated by many of the major scholars resident in Najaf during the 1920s, he established himself as a *mujtahid* of considerable public influence in Lucknow from around 1931. Over the next decade, he built up an organisation called the Imamiya Mission, which undertook widespread Shi'i publishing and propagation. Profoundly resembling contemporaneous missionary movements in South Asia like the Tablighi Jama'at and Hindu *shuddhi* movement in its language

---

Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam (Houston, 1986); *Al-Serat: Papers from the Imam Husayn Conference, London 1984* (London, 1986); Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* (London, 1982), pp. 181–194.

3 "The [Karbala] story … provides models for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live: there is a set of parables and moral lessons all connected with or part of the story of Karbala. . . to which all of life's problems can be referred." Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1980), p. 21.

4 Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 74.

5 This term is taken from Evan Siegel, "The politics of *Shahid-e Jawid*", in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History*, (eds.) Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (Leiden, 2001), p. 153.

6 On the career of this luminary and some of his immediate descendants, see Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988); Sajjad Rizvi, "Faith deployed for a new Shi'i polity in India: the theology of Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi", this volume.

of dissemination both within and beyond its own community, it was among the most influential Shiʿi public associations of 1930s–1940s South Asia.[7]

Making use of the organisation's extensive printing enterprises, ʿAli Naqi became a prolific writer, and something of an equivalent to more heavily researched Sunni scholars such as Shibli Numani or Abu'l Hasan ʿAli Nadwi, in his combination of clerical authority and his production of Urdu literature for a lay audience. Unusually for such a senior *mujtahid*, and revealing his aspirations towards public communication, ʿAli Naqi wrote predominantly in Urdu, a fact that greatly enhanced the public reception and influence of his writings. His extensive inventory of publications, combined with his esteemed reputation as *waʿiz* [sermoniser] in Lucknow both during and (atypically for a scholar of his stature) outside the period of Muharram commemorations, served to make ʿAli Naqi one of the most visible and influential Shiʿi voices in South Asia in the decades both before and after independence.

Establishing himself as a young and fresh voice within Lucknow's clerical hierarchy before an emerging Muslim public, ʿAli Naqi's works spanned subjects of religious instruction, law, history, biography (of both the Imams and later clerical luminaries), and social and economic development. Of these tracts, however, dozens were about, or alluded to, the ordeals of Husain and others at Karbala, and it is in this regard that he has perhaps become best known.[8] Broadly speaking, ʿAli Naqi's Husainology was marked by several key features. One was its grounding in 'authentic' Arabic Traditions and other sources, something intended both to combat the alteration of the Karbala tale and also to satisfy claims to authenticity and veracity. Second was the attempt

---

7 Despite their level of influence in late-colonial India, surprisingly little academic work has been done on either ʿAli Naqi Naqvi or the Imamiya Mission. ʿAli Naqi is discussed further in Salamat Rizvi, *Sayīd-ul-ʿUlamā: Hīyāt aūr kārnāmē* (Lucknow, 1988). The Imamiya Mission is discussed in Justin Jones, *Shiʿa Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 208–213.

8 Ali Naqi's tracts on Imam Husain and/or Karbala took on different emphases. Some fell into the genre of *munazara* [disputation], dispelling alleged Sunni untruths about Husain's martyrdom and preventing the 'corruption' (*tehrif*) of the central message. This was the central theme of his first full-length study, *Qātilān-i Husēn kā mazhab* (Lucknow, 1932). Other texts were biographies of key figures involved at Karbala, or renderings of the central Karbala narrative, e.g. *Maʿrka-i Karbalā* (Lucknow, c.1936); others were correctives to popular observation of Muharram, arguing that practices of excessive weeping and ritual mourning should not detract from the central importance of remembrance and rumination: for example, *Azā'i-Husēn kī ahmīyat* (Lucknow, c.1935). Other books were intended for distribution to educate the Shiʿa on their religion, while others aimed to instruct non-Shiʿas, e.g. *Husēn aūr Islām* (Lucknow, c.1940s); some of his biographies of Husain were even meant for children, e.g. *Karbalā kī taʿlīmāt* (Lucknow, c.1940s).

to assert Husain's ordeals and responses as part of a wider ethical paradigm, something that should inform all human actions rather than be recalled merely during the weeks of Muharram. And third, profoundly connected to the former, was the attempt to use the Karbala message as a tool for efforts at religious propagation (*tablighi jad-va-jihad*). This applied both to the Shiʿa themselves, but, crucially, it also entailed communicating the Karbala story to non-Shiʿas, both as a means of proselytisation and as a basis for dialogue between religious schools and traditions.

All of these features are acutely on view in the single-most comprehensive and influential of ʿAli Naqi's writings on Imam Husain: *Shahid-i Insaniyat* [A martyr for humanity]. (The choice to translate the latter term as 'humanity' rather than 'mankind' is explained later). The work, which was compiled from many of his earlier tracts and sermons of the 1930s and so can be taken as a broadly representative aggregate of his thought, was intended to be a comprehensive and authoritative biography of the Imam. It was, moreover, deliberately produced as a 'memorial' (*yadgar*) to commemorate the 1,300th anniversary of the Karbala battle in 1361AH (falling in the Gregorian year of 1942). Written in accessible Urdu prose quite distinct from the Persianate character of much Lucknawi clerical writing, the text was also subsequently translated into several languages and republished in various parts of the subcontinent. Ultimately, *Shahid-i Insaniyat* has become perhaps ʿAli Naqi's most popularly well-known and influential work, as well as one of the most influential Shiʿi writings of twentieth-century South Asia, as familiar and accessible to readers in Karachi, Hyderabad or Ahmedabad as in ʿAli Naqi's native Lucknow. It therefore stands as the central focus of this article.

Focusing in particular, but not exclusively, upon ʿAli Naqi's recasting of Imam Husain and the Karbala tragedy in the early 1940s, this article investigates ʿAli Naqi's Husainology from three perspectives. The first section, which offers a detailed commentary on *Shahid-i Insaniyat*, examines the role of biographical writings in fashioning new constructs of selfhood and ethics, and hence in the making of a more temporally focused form of Shiʿism based on a model of the demystification and moral perfection of the human condition. The second part examines the political project emerging from ʿAli Naqi's Husainology in 1940s India, in which Husain's message was used as a basis both for covert anti-colonial protest and the articulation of a cosmopolitan politics closely aligned with the language of Indian nationalism. A third section assesses some of the legacies of ʿAli Naqi's Husainology, assessing his key writings as a fulcrum around which questions of clerical

leadership and, more recently, Iranian influence on the Indian Shi'a, have been debated and contested.

A Martyr for Humanity: Shi'ism and selfhood in *Shahid-i Insaniyat*

The late nineteenth century onwards saw a powerful expansion, and evolution, of genres of biographical writing in India, for several reasons alongside the growing access to print. For one, the writing of lives became a laboratory for new ideas of selfhood emerging in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ones that developed out of the encounter with Western thought, experiments with new literary genres and the fresh empowerment of individuals and new social groups.[9] Second, biographical writings became used as didactic media of instruction, with the use of 'lives as lessons' reflecting new senses of individual responsibility and duty placed upon communities of readers.[10] Finally, biographical writings became significant platforms for dialogue (both friendly and hostile) between those of different religious confessions. In other words, by penning ruminations on revered personages, scholars across religious traditions were able to speak in shared languages and ethical values, which could span the restrictions of the communitarian or institutional 'paradigms of collectivity' of organised religions.[11]

'Ali Naqi's *Shahid-i Insaniyat*, then, fits neatly into this established literary tradition of its time. Indeed, one may fruitfully compare the work to other, similarly influential, biographies of the key figures of Islamic history penned by influential scholars in the colonial period, among them Shibli Numani's seminal biographies of the Prophet and Caliph 'Umar.[12] 'Ali Naqi's account

9 On the evolution of these ideas of Muslim selfhood in colonial contexts (often conceived as *khudi*), see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London, 2000). For a study of how autobiographical writing became a platform for experiments with new ideas of selfhood, especially in these same decades of the 1930s–1940s, see Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Basingstoke, 2007).

10 For example, Barbara Metcalf, "The past in the present: instruction, pleasure and blessing in Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya's *Aap Biitii*", in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History*, (eds.) David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Delhi, 2004), pp. 116–143.

11 David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, "Introduction: life histories in India", in *Ibid.*, pp. 1–28.

12 Shibli Numani, *'Umar al-Farūq* (Lahore, 1975 [first published 1898]) and *Sīrāt un-Nabī*, Vol. I, (Karachi, 1967 [c.1921]). Coming from the other direction, biographies of the Prophet and other Muslim exemplars were sometimes used by non-Muslim polemicists as means of cataloguing the perceived ills of Islam: for example, William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet: From Original Sources* (London, 1861).

of Husain shared with Numani's works a number of features, including the choice of Urdu as medium; close attention to Arabic scriptures as a means of verifying authority; a focus on its subject's ethical perfections and worldly achievements; and the lauding of the contemporary relevance of the example to all believers. Certainly, there is little doubt that ‘Ali Naqi presented the work as having a similar level of authority and insurpassability to those prototypes. In his introduction, ‘Ali Naqi claimed to be compiling and synthesising a number of scattered, fragmented traditions relating to the Karbala tragedy. "If the unacquainted reader desires to know the historical facts and consequences and necessary details of the events of Karbala and the personality of Husain", he writes in the introduction, "no single work exists by which they may all be known. The following work, on the 1300th anniversary of Karbala, has been written to address this need".[13] This was, then, a complete account, superseding existing interpretations, and claiming its authenticity on the back of its heavy grounding in references to well-founded Traditions. It also seemed designed to satisfy, or perhaps recruit, a new readership, not least in its novel-like qualities, with long descriptions of key characters and rousing, drawn-out battle narratives.

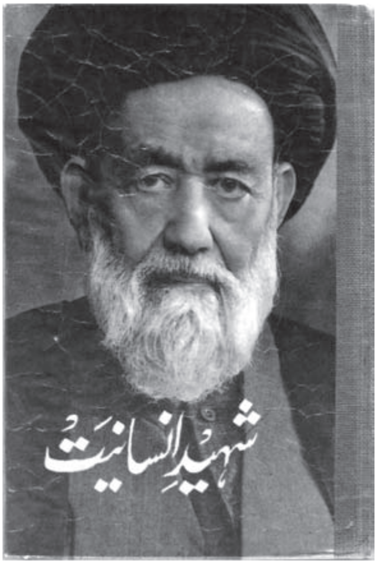


Fig. 4.1 Cover of modern edition of *Shahid-i Insaniyat*, complete with a portrait of ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi (courtesy of Mustafa Husain Asif Ja'isi, Lucknow).

[13] Sayyid ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat* (Lucknow, 1995 [1941–1942]), p. 16.

What is most distinctive about the Husainology of ʿAli Naqi's rendering? First, ʿAli Naqi's Imam Husain is overwhelmingly a figure whose essence and message are defined in terms of his perfection of selfhood. Husain's selfhood, though, far from being conceived in the mystical, Sufi-influenced language of *khudi* that has dominated many academic studies of Muslim selfhood in South Asia[14], is instead conceived in the much more temporal language of *shakhsiyat*: individuality or human character. One of the book's longest chapters runs through Husain's personal attributes, complete with anecdotal illustration: among others, his independence (*istiqlal*), group organisation (*jamaʿati tanzim*), personal honour (*ʿizzat-i nafs*), patience (*sabir*), bravery (*shajaʿat*), selflessness (*isar*), human empathy (*insani hamdardi*) and pacifism (*aman pasandi*).[15] The last in particular is a constantly featured trait: we are told throughout of his "devotion to peace" and his "lack of warlike purpose".[16] Husain's significance lies not in military victories, which were always known to be impossible against Yazid's armies, but in his martyrdom and perfect self-sacrifice (*qurbani*), something that he sought with foreknowledge and a sense of destiny.[17]

This move to considering Husain's importance as derived from his human attributes and strength of character rather than his divine constitution seems to reflect a wider trend among Muslim reformists from the late nineteenth century as part of a move towards more temporally focused 'this-worldly' forms of Islam which demanded worldly agency and correct action on the part of believers.[18] In this context, key archetypes of human behaviour were set down as models of accomplishment, figures to be actively emulated. Imam Husain, thus, becomes the model of the perfected human Self, and it is this that informs ʿAli Naqi's constant emphasis on the contemporary relevance of the message: he is primarily significant not for his own seventh-century accomplishments but for the "moral and civilisational lessons" (*akhlaqi aur*

---

14 On this definition of *khudi*, a concept tied to Sufi motifs of transmigration and enlightenment, see Javed Majeed, *Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, Postcolonialism* (London, 2009), pp. 20–24.

15 Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, pp. 654–694.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 288.

17 The view of Husain as having foreknowledge of his martyrdom is a conventional one among Shiʿi scholars. Significantly, however, it has been rejected by some twentieth-century thinkers, particularly Salehi Najafabadi in the 1960s, who have thus depicted Husain instead as launching a real (though failed) bid for temporal power, which is to be renewed by his followers. See Siegel, "The politics of *Shahid-e Jawid*", pp. 150–156; Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shiʿi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle, 2004), pp. 92–96.

18 Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 105–121.

tamaduni taʿlimat) set down for mankind in Karbala.[19] This was, moreover, a message to be received by women, as well as men.[20]

Further compounding his status as moral exemplar, another major feature of ʿAli Naqi's Husain was the complete absence of reference to Husain as intercessor or divine hero. Husain's mortal humanity was the work's dominant message. His sacrifice is predicated upon his human capacity for suffering, while never is he given any mystical qualities or intercessionary powers. This vision of Husain was certainly in contrast to many aspects of popular Shiʿism in north India. While the worldly invocation of the Imams as charismatic intermediaries was maligned by many of the *ʿulama*, who dismissed such practices as 'Shaikhi', Sufi or Hindu interpolations, it was commonplace for Muslims to pray to the Imams and their comrades as intercessors for the lifting of afflictions. Allusions to Husain's miraculous or intercessionary powers were also found in much South Asian Shiʿi writing of the period. Nineteenth-century Urdu *marsiya* compositions frequently embellished Husain with other-worldly charisma, addressing him with eulogising epithets such as "Lord of the World", "Celestial King" and "Ruler of Creation", all of which blurred the lines between humanity and divinity.[21] Other, lay-authored religious tracts documented popular beliefs in Husain's worldly interventions in the form of miracles, or in his presence in effigies of his tomb during Muharram, well into the twentieth century.[22] No such titles

19 Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, p. 578.

20 While of course most of *Shahid-i Insaniyat* focuses upon Husain, the role played by women in the text is highly prominent. One example is an episode featuring Imam ʿAli's daughter Zainab bint ʿAli who, seeing a caravan of surviving prisoners brought from Karbala to Kufa, chides Yazid's army for their mistreatment of the women of the Prophet's family. Her "powerful oratory", damning Yazid's oppressions and exposing the extent of his despotism, is depicted as bringing the crowds of men and women to tears, and as being a critical part of the exposure of Yazid's cruelty and illegitimacy to the world: *Ibid.*, pp. 526–533. One might infer, then, that ʿAli Naqi inverts more traditional emphases in the Karbala story upon its women as characters of submission and suffering, instead evoking women as active orators who are critical to the preservation and transmission of Karbala's lessons.

21 For example, Mir Babar ʿAli Anis, *The Battle of Karbala* [1850s], introd; David Matthews (Delhi, 2003), pp. 21–22, 42–45. It is also worth noting that such an emphasis on the spiritual charisma of Husain was not exclusive to India but had currency in Qajar Iran. For instance, Mirza Muhammad Taqi Sepehr's *Nasikh al-tawārīkh* (1879), an important Karbala narrative of the later Qajar period, ruminated on the pre-existence of the Imams before the world's creation, and the ritual practices to be observed when in their presence at their tombs. Aghaie, *Martyrs of Karbala*, p. 89.

22 For one late nineteenth-century Lucknawi account that traces the miracles of the Imams Hasan and Husain, see ʿAbd ul-ʿAziz, *Majmūʿa-i muʿjizaʾt* (Lucknow, 1873). For discussions of tales concerning the apparent appearance of Imam Husain during *taʿziya* processions in

or deeds, though, are assigned in ʻAli Naqi's work. Indeed, ʻAli Naqi seems to have gone further than many authoritative renditions of Husain's martyrdom in his omission of any bonds between the celestial and worldly realms. One example is the absence within *Shahid-i Insaniyat* of any reference to direct communication between Husain and God during the former's prayer. Even such an unparalleled *mujtahid* as the Safavid-era scholar Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, in his authoritative seventeenth-century compilation of Shiʻi Traditions *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, had recorded the Prophet speaking to Husain before battle to assure him of his ultimate heavenly inheritance.[23] ʻAli Naqi, though, omits any such reference from his own coverage of the story, and while Husain is depicted praying to God on numerous occasions on the eve of his martyrdom (with, on one occasion, his invocations and those of his followers sounding like "the humming of bees"), he receives no audible reply.[24]

A useful typology for understanding this discrepancy between Husain's saintly and worldly constitutions is set by Mary Hegland's study of the changing perception of Husain's character in revolutionary Iran. Imam Husain, Hegland argues, has historically been interpreted through two "opposing ideologies". First, "Husain as intercessor", with his martyrdom being the basis of his status as God's witness (another meaning of the term *shahid*), giving him unique powers of intercession between man and God. This view underwrote beliefs in Husain's abilities to answer prayers, forgive sins and lift afflictions. Second, "Husain as exemplar", by which his very human nature and ordeal is highlighted.[25] In practice, in both Iranian and Indian Shiʻism, these two contrasting images of Husain have existed alongside each other, in careful balance. However, writings such as that of ʻAli Naqi show a decisive move towards the latter. His demystified portrayal of Husain may compare to the well-documented "Protestantisation" of South Asian Sunni Islam in the modern period enacted by reformists such as those of the Deobandi or Ahl-i Hadis movements, whose rejection of shrine worship and ideas of the intercession of saints have been depicted as inculcating a fresh, this-worldly orientation. Indeed, one might speculate as to whether

his honour, tales which apparently circulated in Bombay and north India, see Saʻid ʻAbid ʻAli, *Fāzilat-nāma-i taʻzīya* (Bahraich, 1908).

23 Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of the ʻAshura in Twelver Shiʻism* (The Hague, 1978), p. 124.

24 For example, Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, pp. 367, 371.

25 Mary Hegland, "Two images of Husain: accommodation and revolution in an Iranian village", in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiʻism from Quietism to Revolution*, (ed.) Nikki Keddie (New Haven, 1983), pp. 218–237.

ʿAli Naqi's demystified presentation of Husain may represent an early and influential precedent to the 'Shiʿi Wahhabism' which was to emerge in South Asia several decades later, one that denigrated popular emphasis on the divine qualities of the Imams, though of course directed towards a very different purpose.[26]

If the establishment of Husain's character as a moral lesson for mankind was one of the core purposes of ʿAli Naqi's text, then this promotion of Husain as exemplar for all humanity further necessitated a distancing from the exclusive, aristocratic social milieu in Lucknow within which Shiʿism had often been contained. In Awadh, Shiʿism had long been associated largely with rural landowning gentries and the Lucknawi service nobility, most of whom claimed direct descent from the Imams as *sayyid*s. The leading roles of these *sayyid*s in many cultural manifestations of the Karbala tragedy, from their patronage of Muharram functions to the courtly style of many gatherings for the recitation of *majlis* sermons, tended to reflect, or even cement, their ongoing status as the social and religious leaders of Shiʿism. Little such social exclusivity or *sayyid* preferentialism is visible in ʿAli Naqi's Husain. Particularly instructive here is a chapter discussing the roots of Husain's perfections. Good human character, ʿAli Naqi argues, is created by three elements: "traditions of noble ancestry" (*buzurgon ke qadim rivayat*); one's circumstances, education and condition (*mahwal, taʿalim, tarbiyat*); and third, one's "life-changing experiences" (*zindagi ke ahem tajurba*). While Husain's family distinctions were beyond question, ʿAli Naqi argues, his character also reflected "mankind's highest morals and attributes" (*insan ke akhlaq va ausaf*), while "the adversarial experiences in his own life. . . gave him a character of strength, prudence and free-thinking" (*pukhtakari, tadabur, istiqlal*).[27] As well as making Husain a model for all human behaviour, then, such writings may well have carried a quiet critique of those aspects of lived Shiʿi cultural observance which often exhibited an attachment to *sayyid* cultural norms. They opened Husain's message not only to the leading *sayyid*s but, significantly, to all of his followers (*mominin*).

A final, and important, central feature of ʿAli Naqi's Husainology was the attempt to universalise Husain's message beyond the Shiʿa themselves, to all of humankind. In the introduction, using language echoed throughout the text, he stresses that "all the people of the world (*dunyai'e insaniyat*), all of its faiths

[26] For example, Syed Husain Arif Naqvi, "The controversy about the Shaykhiyya tendency among Shiʿa *'ulama'* in Pakistan", in *The Twelver Shiʿa*, (eds.) Brunner and Ende, pp. 142–148.

[27] Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, pp. 178–180.

and communities" (*mazhab-va-millat ke afrad*) can agree with the "presence of righteousness, justice and truth" (*haq, insaf, sacha'i*) in the message of Karbala.[28] The idea of such values inherent within Husain's martyrdom as being common (*mushtarakih*) to all religions is one that appears throughout the text. This take on Husain's lessons is particularly significant, for it eschews more 'sectarian' incantations, which asserted that the Shi'a alone were the custodians and beneficiaries of Husain's revelation, in favour of a broader ecumenism that reaches out to other religious communities. Certainly this helps to explain why the text is largely free from the themes of *munazara* (religious disputation) apparent in many Shi'i and other clerical tracts of the period.[29] But it also comprised an audacious statement on Shi'a–Sunni unity, with the text defining the term of "Muslim" simply to refer to one who ascribes to the moral values and lessons of Husain, and hence implicitly using his message as a basis for cross-sectarian dialogue. This was, of course, an especially bold message in 1940s Lucknow. With some contemporary Sunni *maulvi*s claiming that praise of the Sunni Caliphs (*madh-i sahaba*) should be conducted during Muharram, and some Shi'a counter-advocating the cursing of the Sunni Caliphs (*tabarra*) as an important part of commemorating Husain, the pre-independence decade probably marked the all-time nadir in Shi'a–Sunni relations in 'Ali Naqi's home city.[30] 'Ali Naqi's Husainology, in this context, appeared to contradict the more sectional tendencies associated with many contemporaneous *'ulama*, and more closely echoed the efforts of twentieth-century non-clerical intellectuals (like Iqbal or 'Ali Shari'ati, as discussed below) in his attempts to freely explore the more universal, expansive nature of Husain's message, unfettered by the constraints of clerical polemicism.

An important part of this attempt to promote inner-Islamic unity is the text's assignment of responsibility for Husain's death to the whims of individual, illegitimate Caliphs rather than the institution of the Caliphate itself. At one point, for instance, 'Ali Naqi turns to the beliefs of "most Muslims" in the institution of the Caliphate, and distinguishes the "rightly guided Caliphate" of the first four Caliphs (*khilafat-i rashidah* – it is indeed significant that a Shi'i scholar is willing to apply these words) from the so-called savage regime

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[29] Interestingly, the main religion to receive reprimand from 'Ali Naqi is not Sunni Islam but Christianity; for Jesus' divine character is perceived as compromising his claims to suffering, unlike that of Husain. *Ibid.*, pp. 371–372.

[30] For details, see Jones, *Shi'a Islam*, pp. 186–199.

(*mulk-i ‘azooz*) of Mu‘awiya, Yazid and some of their successors, whose rule was marked by illegitimacy, decadence and drunkenness.[31] Without quite sanctioning the legitimacy of the Caliphate, such an argument nevertheless alludes to common ground in Shi‘i and Sunni values, and by confining criticism to individual Caliphs and officers, he perhaps relieves the earlier Sunni Caliphs and their followers from answerability for the later actions of the ‘Umayyad rulers.

‘Ali Naqi's Husainology, then, was in many ways as revolutionary as the figure it described. In effect, it appeared to speak simultaneously to audiences at different levels. Looking beyond Shi‘ism to humanity as a whole, ‘Ali Naqi's telling sought to refresh and popularise Husain's message, promoting awareness of Imam Husain's sacrifice as an embodiment of an ethical ideal common to all religions. Meanwhile, the tract actually carried various implications for belief and practice within Shi‘ism itself. Within its message were a number of veiled criticisms of features of popular Shi‘ism as lived in India, among them its beliefs in intercession and divination; its proclivities for elitist or aristocratic social settings; its tendencies towards sectional understandings of Husain's message and polemical tellings of Karbala; and the obscurantism of many of the *‘ulama*.

According to ‘Ali Naqi, Husain's aim was “not to launch a material war to defeat Yazid”, which would have been militarily impossible, but instead to “inaugurate a spiritual revolution” (*zahni inqilab*), one with perhaps three key aspects.[32] First was the role of Husain's message in exposing truth and preordaining the historical justice of the collapse of the ‘Umayyad Caliphate. Second was the propagation (*tabligh*) of an eternal example to all Muslims, establishing the true message of Islam. Connected with both of these was his establishment of a model for perfect human behaviour and ethical piety: all Muslims were obliged to emulate Husain's struggle against injustice in all its forms. ‘Ali Naqi firmly established Husain as a figure to be imitated rather than invoked, and his message as one to be shared rather than guarded. However, in a context as charged as that of 1940s north India, his perspective on Imam Husain as an enlightened revolutionary and fighter against oppression could readily be applied by others in more acutely political manifestations.

---

31 Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, pp. 645–646. The word *‘azooz* refers to the gnashing of horses, and so again is resonant of the opposing armies at Karbala.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 646–647.

Husain Day, 1942: Shiʿism and the politics of quitting India

The application of Imam Husain to forms of political resistance was nothing new in South Asia. Shiʿi languages of martyrology had crept into anti-colonial mobilisations in Awadh as early as 1857.[33] From the 1900s, but especially by the 1930s, a number of writers and poets, among them Muhammad ʿAli, Muhammad Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi, were evoking the Karbala tragedy, with distinct recourse to the more political elements of Husain's struggle, as a metaphor for the ongoing existential battle between righteousness and iniquity.[34] For Iran, the recasting of Imam Husain's message as an incitement to political revolution – contradicting the use of the Karbala paradigm in legitimising the Qajar regime for much of the nineteenth century – has been widely noted for key political moments. The Tobacco Concession protests (1891–1892), the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1906), and perhaps most significantly, the stoking of opposition to the regime of the Shah in the 1960s–1970s, have all been conceived as reinterpreting Husain's struggle against injustice as one vindicating active revolution against oppressive rulers in contemporary times.[35]

As argued above, ʿAli Naqi's opus was concerned primarily with establishing Husain's worldly relevance and his status as a model for the perfected Muslim self, and contained little in the way of explicit exhortation to direct political action. Indeed, ʿAli Naqi has sometimes been interpreted as being apolitical, perhaps on account of the absence from his thought of an agenda of political Islamisation, and the recognition of the idea of India as a secular, pluralist nation-state which flows through his writings. He was, though, also well known as a scholar keen to engage concerns and themes of contemporary relevance[36], and so his writings often carried implicit political connotations that could lend themselves to more explicit applications. Reflecting the proclivity of many Muslim intellectuals by the early twentieth century to draw from national and transnational political ideas from beyond the Islamic

[33] Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, pp. 273–274.

[34] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, pp. 137–169.

[35] For an excellent discussion of the reworking of Husainology before and during the 1979 revolution, many features of which overlap with ʿAli Naqi's reinterpretation of the qualities of the Imam, see Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, pp. 87–112.

[36] See, for example, works on questions of the use of reason, the response to modern commerce, the decline of Arabic education in India and the inviolability of personal laws. Respectively, ʿAli Naqi Naqvi, *Mazhab aūr ʿaql* (Lucknow, 1941), *Tijārat aūr Islām* (Lucknow, 1933), *Tazkira-i hifāz Shīʿa* (Lucknow, 1933) and *Muslim Parsanal Lā: nā qābil tabdīl* (Delhi, c.1973).

tradition[37], ‘Ali Naqi's *Shahid-i Insaniyat* seemed at key junctures to allude to apparently constitutional and political terminology and rhetoric. Take, for example, the following passage: "Islam preached a message of liberty (*hurriyat*), equality (*musawat*) and fraternity (*insani biradari*) and, for the first time in history, it endowed upon mankind the message of civil and human rights (*shehri aur insani huqooq)*; from this can be created the articles of community or nationhood (*qaumiyat*), which can vanquish all poverty and misfortune".[38] Not only do we seem to have a vernacular rendition of the French revolutionary vocabulary that informed the liberal rhetoric of many Indian nationalists,[39] but we also see the application of the languages of rights, citizenship and nationalism which were circulating in more formal political arenas.

An overtly political application for *Shahid-i Insaniyat* in 1940s India was developed by a local religious *anjuman* (association) called the Yadgar-i Husaini, one closely associated personally with ‘Ali Naqi and his family. The organisation, which throughout the 1930s had engaged primarily with the management of Muharram rites and *majlis* gatherings in ‘Ali Naqi's family Ghufran-i Maab *imambara*, by the beginning of the 1940s turned its attention to promoting the commemoration of Husain upon the 1,300th anniversary of his martyrdom. Soon before this anniversary, the organisation established what it called a "Husain Day Committee", with the aim of organising a public event for rumination upon Husain's modern significance. Taking its lead from *Shahid-i Insaniyat*, the organisation's aim was to reach out across religious boundaries, and the committee itself was comprised of a number of Shi‘i, Hindu and a few Sunni professionals, mostly Lucknawi lawyers and journalists.[40] Establishing the plan to hold "Husain Day" as a large three-day public event in Lucknow on 16–18 August of that year, the intention was to invite speakers and politicians of local and national reputation to offer

---

37 One might include here not simply those in the Muslim ‘modernist' tradition but also ‘Islamist' thinkers, such as Egypt's Hassan al-Banna and Hyderabad's Abu'l Ala Mawdudi, who have been well known for their synthesising of Islamic values and laws with ‘Western' political institutions and constructs of statehood.

38 Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, p. 40.

39 Studies have frequently shown how ‘moderate' Congress nationalists, among them Dadabhai Naoroji and Surendranath Banerjea, engaged the language of "liberty, equality, fraternity" as well as an array of other ideas and terms drawn from European liberal political thought: see Stephen Hay (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition, volume II: Modern India and Pakistan* (New York, 1988), pp. 89–101.

40 Prominent members included the Lucknawi advocate Brijnath Sharghi and Mohan Lal Saxena, the latter best known as a lawyer for the defence in the Kakori Conspiracy Case (1925–1927) and the Lahore Conspiracy Case (1928–1931).

speeches reflecting upon Husain's message, emphasising particularly his significance as an icon for all of humanity.

No explicit statement was made that this occasion was to be anything but a cultural event promoting cross-religious dialogue, but nevertheless all of those approached to speak at the event were senior figures from India's political life. Showing the breadth of political consensus sought around the meaning of Karbala, those receiving invitations included Nehru, Gandhi, Abu'l Kalam Azad and many other national and provincial Congress leaders, senior UP Muslim League politicians such as Muhammad Isma'il Khan and Liaquat 'Ali Khan (interestingly, no invitation for Jinnah), Sikander Hayat Khan of the Unionist Party, the president of the Theosophical Society and senior officials of princely states such as Bahawalpur and Hyderabad.[41] Predictably, such senior statesmen did not attend, but more minor public figures did contribute to the event and loyally rendered the event's central message of Husain's universal relevance. Such can be seen in the presidential address of Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth of Kotra, a politician active in both UP landed politics and the Hindu Mahasabha, and one of the Husain Day Committee's most high-profile members. In his opening presidential address, he spoke of "the fundamental unity underlying the great religions of the world", using this to claim that religious antagonism could never be justified.[42] 'Ali Naqi's own presidential speech, ruminating again on the role of Husain as a common icon for Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others, again seemed to simply condense the central message of his own literary endeavours.[43]

The activities and rallies planned for Husain Day were supervised by a band of uniformed activists (*karkanan*) who seemed to be inspired by a number of other Muslim volunteer movements emerging in 1930s–1940s north India, whether UP's Tanzim movement, the Punjabi-origin Khaksar and Majlis-i Ahrar movements or the Frontier's Khuda'i Khitmatgars. Indeed, even their uniforms – starred red badges (pictured) and white belts marked with the insignia of Husain's sword – seemed to be part of a wider purpose of seeking cross-religious participation. Forfeiting the traditional Shi'i black iconography of mourning for imagery more openly valorous and triumphant, this colour scheme was more accommodating of Sunni and Hindu understandings of Husain's significance.

41 Mirza Muhammad Ja'far Husain, *Rapōrt-i Luckna'u Husēn Dēy Kamitī, mukamil rū'īdād-i jalsa-i hā'ī sēzdah sad-sāla-i Yādgār-i Husēnī, munaqīda 16–18 Āugust 1942* (Lucknow, c.1943), *passim*.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 41–44.

In other ways, this novel forum for the memorialisation of Husain allowed equally experimental forms of dialogue between religious confessions. Particularly interesting was the attempt by a number of Hindu speakers at the events to ground the Karbala message within a Hindu context of meaning. One, Pandit Chandurkar Prasad, claimed that Husain was an "ultimate model for human agency" (*insani qawwat*) comparable to the role of luminaries like Krishna, Ram or Gautam Buddha in other traditions; though, according to this speaker, he was distinct from these in never claiming to be godly himself.[44] Another, Pandit Ram Charan Vidhyarti, compared Husain's personal qualities with the perfect model of behaviour laid down in Swami Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash* [The light of truth], the founding work of the Hindu reformist organisation the Arya Samaj, first published in 1875. The qualities of righteousness, justice, compassion and worldly action, he argues, are much the same; the only difference being that Dayanand described these qualities as being "inseparable from *dharma*", a claim disproven by Husain.[45] Another speaker, representing the Achhut [Untouchable] Conference, described Husain as a model of compassion for the oppressed.[46] All of these contributions apparently sat in an intermediate space between religious dialogue (*taqrib*) and, perhaps, confutation (*munazara*). They could be seen, and were presented, as building unity between Hindu and Muslim understandings; but at the same time, all appeared, in these references to contentious themes like idolatory, Arya reformism and casteism, to make capital out of existing controversies within Hinduism itself.



Fig. 4.2 (Colour online) Design for the red badges worn by Husain Day members and volunteers, 1942 (courtesy of Mustafa Husain Asif Ja'isi, Lucknow)

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
45 *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–46.

A further feature of the Husain Day Committee of great significance – and one that it was itself forced to admit – was that the body, despite its declared wishes to span the political spectrum, was dominated by local members of the Indian National Congress.[47] This apparent overlap may reflect a frequent political alignment between the north Indian Shiʿa and Congress, based largely around the former's apprehensive attitude towards the All India Muslim League.[48] Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, it may also reflect a close confluence of ʿAli Naqi's reading of Husain – not as an icon merely for the Shiʿa but as an exemplar for all humanity – and the cross-communal, incorporative political aspirations of many Congress nationalists. Indeed, the hints at cross-confessional dialogue in *Shahid-i Insaniyat* were more explicitly evident in a public forum during Husain Day, when Imam Husain was obviously held up as a suitable icon for a unitary nationalism.

It was by fate rather than design that the dates selected earlier in the year for Husain Day would happen to fall in the centre of the Quit India movement, a moment that saw not just the mass imprisonment of much of India's senior nationalist leadership but the most extensive public anti-governmental dissent in years. That Husain Day in the end materialised not as the great gathering of national political figureheads as had been intended, but instead as a relatively modest event sporting only minor public figures, was attributed by the committee to the specific events of this month: political turbulence, incarceration of politicians, restrictions on travel and heavy monsoon rains. On the other hand, this coincidental timing perhaps allowed Husain Day to take on a particular significance that it otherwise may not have enjoyed, as a covert forum for anti-colonial protest. With the municipal government having given permission for the events, right down to the minutiae of facilitating transportation convoys and granting permission for poster displays and the use of loudspeakers, the functions were able to go ahead. Speeches evoking Husain's struggle against the tyranny and oppression of unjust leaders, issued by local Congress activists – clear political statements in all but name – thus went ahead at a moment representing the very height of restrictions on formal political activity.[49] Recitations of Josh Malihabadi's

---

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[48] Major Shiʿi political organisations of north India like the All India Shiʿa Political Conference, which wielded considerable influence in the UP in the decade before independence, aligned themselves with Congress rather than the Muslim League.

[49] This implied but clear political connotation relates to what Aghaie calls the "multi-vocality" of Karbala's symbology: the unspoken identification of a government with Yazid meant that a regime could be publicly criticised in sermons on Karbala without ever being directly named, as was the case in Pahlavi Iran. Aghaie, *Martyrs of Karbala*, p. 111.

politicised verse on Karbala, and the presentation by lesser poets of new verse arguing defiantly for the replacement of the regime of "Yazidiyat" with that of "Husainiyat",[50] carried an obvious contemporary message that nevertheless remained uncensored by government restrictions.

Perhaps just as useful for understanding the multifarious political applications of the Karbala paradigm in 1940s India were the declarations of support sent to the Yadgar-i Husaini by those various nationalist politicians who were invited to the event but did not attend. Predictably, such figures were usually those of the highest stature, and the different shades of interpretation of Husain's significance visible in their declarations mirror the subtle discrepancies of thought among India's key nationalist politicians. So, for instance, Abu'l Kalam Azad emphasised Husain's message of action, seeing his message as an exhortation "to fight and die" and to refuse to surrender to "despotism and tyranny", perhaps reflecting his own experiments with ideas of *jihad*.[51] Gandhi's interpretation, meanwhile, rather contrarily emphasised "not the sword [but] … the sacrifice" of Husain, who "accepted death and the torture of thirst".[52] Such an interpretation, of course, recast Shiʿi martyrology in a frame somewhat closer to Gandhian notions of pacifism and civil disobedience, and highlighted the close parallels between ʿAli Naqi's Husainology, which endlessly stressed themes of devotion to peace and self-sacrifice, and a Gandhian model of *satyagraha*.[53] Nehru, meanwhile, took a different angle, emphasising how gatherings held in commemoration of Husain, such as Husain Day as well as annual Muharram observances, "gathered together people of differing faiths, or people of no particular religious persuasion. . . we could all join together in friendship and comradeship".[54] Such words seemed to hint at the vision of a

---

50 Husain, *Rapōrt-i Luckna'u Husēn Dēy Kamitī*, pp. 98–99.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 204. For context on Azad's amalgamation of the ethics of *jihad* with the project of anti-colonial resistance, see Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), pp. 192–203. On Azad's own extensive poetic compositions concerning Husain's martyrdom, which can partly be interpreted within this context of resistance, see Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, pp. 150–151.

52 Husain, *Rapōrt-i Luckna'u Husēn Dēy Kamitī*, p. 204.

53 Gandhi is widely known to have lauded Husain's example, and indeed, his diaries record his reading of a biography of Imam Husain during his detention in the aftermath of the civil disobedience movement of the early 1930s. See "Diary 1932, January 10", in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 55 (Delhi, 1999), p. 447. This might be linked to Faisal Devji's suggestion that Gandhi widely applied the theme of *shahadat* in his political ruminations, one in many contexts highly resonant of Shiʿism. Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (London, 2008), p. 19.

54 Husain, *Rapōrt-i Luckna'u Husēn Dēy Kamitī*, p. 204.

cosmopolitan, assimilative India that would, a couple of years later, be evoked within Nehru's own jail-authored autobiographical meditations on India's character.[55] These examples illustrate the existence of various discrepancies in the readings of Husain's significance by Indian nationalists, who were thus able to mould the Karbala message in such a way as to reinforce their own particular interpretations and methods of nationalist thought and action.

Despite rather under-reaching its own lofty ambitions, the occasion of Husain Day was nevertheless declared to represent a "brotherhood of humanity" (*insaniyat ki biradari*) whose crowds, gathered in Lucknow's Qaiserbagh Baradari to honour the values of truth, sincerity and freedom, resembled Husain's original followers on the hot plains of Karbala.[56] The event itself, and in particular its somewhat accidental but equally fortuitous placing of Husain's martyrdom at the heart of the Quit India movement, remains significant for several reasons. First, its activities show the continuation of an established, though often overlooked, tradition in the Awadh region of using Husain as an inspiration for political protest, one going back as far as the 1857 Rebellion. Second, for all that has been said about Congress's flirtation with an inescapably Hindu political language in late-colonial north India,[57] here we have a local Congress forum, made up of Hindus as well as Shi'i and Sunni Muslims, communicating through an explicitly Islamicate idiom of political protest right into the 1940s. Third, and connected with this point, was the Husain Day Committee's apparent binding of the political notion of *satyagraha*, the Gandhian idea of purposeful and enlightened self-sacrifice, with the deliberate and foreknown *shahadat* (martyrdom) of Husain. A distinctly Shi'i idiom of martyrdom, thereby, was co-opted into a Congress-led nationalist language of self-sacrifice and civil disobedience.[58] The application of Shi'i martyrology as a tool of 'state-making' has been well documented for, say, post-1979 Iran,[59] but perhaps here we actually see a

---

55 For a frequently quoted example of Nehru's description of India's incorporative cultures and history which to some degree mirrors these statements, see Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Bombay, 1969 [1946]), pp. 49–63.

56 Husain, *Rapōrt-i Luckna'u Husēn Dēy Kamitī*, pp. 13–14.

57 William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late-Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2004).

58 Other twentieth-century Shi'i *zakir*s have similarly adopted a Gandhian rubric and spoken of Husain's campaign as a *satyagraha*. See Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, p. 91.

59 For an extremely deft discussion of the post-1979 Iranian state's co-option of the language of martyrdom and definition of martyrs in service of state legitimisation, see Ravinder Kaur, "Sacralising bodies: on martyrdom, government and accident in Iran", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XX, 4 (2010), pp. 441–460.

comparable usage in pre-independence India, with the clear incorporation of the Karbala paradigm within the rhetoric and methodology of a late-colonial Indian nationalism.

Thirst, redemption and revolution: The afterlives of ʿAli Naqi's Husainology, from 1940s India to 1970s Iran

Ultimately, so bold was ʿAli Naqi's rendition of the Karbala tragedy that this book would become just as famous for the controversies it elicited, and the divergent uses to which is has been put, as for its original message. In this section, we turn to the text's quite unpredictable afterlife in the several decades after its original appearance, with reference both to South Asia and also to revolutionary Iran.

Shahid-i Insaniyat became open to intense confutation almost as soon as it was published. For ʿAli Naqi's opponents, his ecumenical Husainology and attempt to reach out beyond the Shiʿi community meant that the text was marked by an understatement, perhaps even a denial, both of the atrocities of the Sunni Caliphs, and of the sufferings of Husain and his comrades. Both such features were felt to dilute the central message of Husain's ordeal.[60] Two claims in the text, in particular, were chanced upon, and became the immediate focus for this wider debate. One was his perhaps implied pardoning of the first three Sunni Caliphs from complicity in Husain's death, as discussed above. Second, and the statement receiving most attention from his detractors, was his claim that in the days preceding the battle on 10th Muharram, when Yazid's armies prevented Husain and his family from reaching the river, some of Husain's comrades did manage to evade the guards and "succeeded in bringing water for Husain".[61] Such a statement, perhaps included to demonstrate the unfailing loyalty of Husain's comrades, was seen by ʿAli Naqi's critics as underplaying a central pillar of Husain's sufferings – his thirst – and hence compromising the depth of his sacrifice.

The argument that emerged about this statement was a lesson in the ever fractious, complex clerical milieu of Lucknow. It was apparently stoked by a number of *zakir*s and *ʿulama* in Lucknow, many of whom were connected to the Tanzeem-ul-Mominin, a Shiʿi activist group that had recently played a leading role in Indian political life. A number, it is said, published defamations of ʿAli Naqi and the Yadgar-i Husaini association with which he was linked, in Shiʿi newspapers such as *Sarfaraz*. Some, it seems, accused ʿAli

60 C. f. Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, pp. 80, 102.
61 Naqvi, *Shahīd-i Insānīyat*, pp. 349–353.

Naqi not just of inaccuracy, but of practising a kind of '*taqiya*': a concealment or denial of what is specifically Shi'i, in his attempting to reach out to those of other confessions.[62] 'Ali Naqi's supporters, meanwhile, were quick to brand his opponents as "self-important" (*khud-sakta*) *maulvi*s, ill-versed in their religion and "doing the work of Yazid" in their sowing of divisions within the Muslim community.[63] So intense were the rows surrounding the book that in 1945 the Raja of Mahmudabad, north India's most influential Shi'i landowner and politician, convened a meeting of the opposing parties at his property, facilitating an agreement to recall the publication and make appropriate amendments to the text. The row nevertheless endured. Not only was 'Ali Naqi banned from attendance at the congregations of major Shi'i organisations like the All India Shi'a Conference, but over subsequent decades several *maulvis* in Bombay, Hyderabad and Lucknow penned pathos-laden ruminations on the unalleviated thirst of Husain, in explicit retort to 'Ali Naqi's account.[64]

Quite aside from the claims that initially sparked the row, the whole episode also reveals the extent to which such distinctions of opinion cannot be separated from the alternative issue of sheer competition for influence within Lucknow's intricate Shi'i clerical hierarchy. The allegation is frequently heard that the row was engineered by particular clerical families in response to the young 'Ali Naqi's quick ascendance to the status of north India's most publicly influential *mujtahid*. Of particular significance here was the *mujtahid* Muhammad Naseer, son and successor of one of South Asia's great Shi'i luminaries, Nasir Husain 'Abaqati. Having recently assumed the role of the leading *mujtahid* of the 'Abaqati clerical family following his father's death in 1942, Muhammad Naseer is often claimed to have manufactured the row in an attempt to strengthen the ailing profile of himself and his household against 'Ali Naqi's expanding celebrity.[65] True or not, the consequence has been that north Indian Shi'i clerical opinion in the decades after independence has often been informally described as divided into the respective 'Abaqati and Naqvi factions. Of these, each side adheres to the Husainology of one of 1940's Lucknow's two most influential scholars; and, correspondingly, to a more exclusivist or ecumenical approach to relations with Sunni Muslims respectively.

---

62 Zafar Sherwani, *Kitāb-i shahīd-i insānīyat: azhār-i hāq* (Hyderabad, 1954), pp. 4–34.

63 Rizvi, *Sayīd-ul-'Ulamā*, pp. 75–79.

64 Notably Sayyid Ghulam 'Askari, *Pīyās* (Bombay, 1973).

65 Rizvi, *Sayīd-ul-'Ulamā*, pp. 75–79.

While these arguments festered in India, a further and perhaps surprising legacy of *Shahid-i Insaniyat* has been its apparent synergy with the version of the Karbala paradigm promulgated in revolutionary Iran. The book quickly appeared in Farsi translation and has circulated widely in Qom and Tehran as well as South Asia. It is an (albeit questionable) argument heard frequently in contemporary Lucknow that, since Rohullah Khomeini's family roots lay in Awadh,[66] he was particularly attentive to ideas and influences coming from Lucknawi Shiʿism, and the close ties between ʿAli Naqi and Khomeini's interpretations of Karbala are cited as evidence of the former's undeclared influence upon the latter. Indeed, there are doubtlessly striking similarities between the Husainology of ʿAli Naqi and that of Khomeini and associated revolutionary rhetoricians. First, Khomeini's evocation in various speeches of Imam Husain in the 1970s as the enlightened self, one significant less for his saintly qualities and more for the temporal message of the triumph of selfhood and justice over doubt and adversity.[67] Second, Khomeini's focus on Husain as revolutionary, actively resisting tyranny and oppression, and hence a figure to be actively invoked in worldly action. Third, and perhaps most striking, was Khomeini's attempt to use Husain as a unitary bridge to construct a cross-confessional Shiʿa-Sunni entente (*taqrib*), and hence to bring about a global Muslim unity. Indeed, Khomeini's declared desire to "export" Iran's revolution to the global *umma* in the 1980s[68] rested to a degree upon the application of an ecumenical interpretation of Imam Husain that bore close resemblance to that used by ʿAli Naqi forty years earlier to forge unity among India's cross-confessional populations.

---

66 Khomeini's paternal grandfather was descended from a line of *sayyid*s based in Kintor, a *qasba* [township] in rural Awadh outlying Lucknow. His grandfather emigrated from India to Iran around the 1830s.

67 See examples of Khomeini's public ruminations on Husain in Hamid Algar (ed.), *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (London, 1985), esp. pp. 31, 108, 113. An equally striking resemblance to ʿAli Naqi's work is shown in the writings of the revolutionary ideologue ʿAli Shariʿati. His reflections on the need for the individual to take control of destiny to free society of injustice and deceit, and his talk of the recovery of an objectified 'self', share deep parallels with ʿAli Naqi's thought, even if they lack direct connection: for example ʿAli Shariʿati, "Intizar, the Religion of Protest" [1971] and "Return to the Self", both translated and republished in John Donohue and John Esposito (eds.), *Islam in Transition*, pp. 297–307; c.f. ʿAli Shariʿati, "A discussion of Shahid", in Taleqani et al, *Jihad and Shahadat*, pp. 230–243.

68 On efforts at *taqrib* in revolutionary Iran, see W. Buchta, "Tehran's Ecumenical Society (Majmaʿ al-Taqrib): a veritable ecumenical revival or a Trojan horse of Iran?", in *The Twelver Shia*, (eds.) Brunner and Ende, and David Menashri, "Khomeini's vision: nationalism or world order?", in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, (ed.) David Menashri (Boulder, 1990).

Regardless of the veracity of the claim that ʻAli Naqi's Husainology directly influenced Iranian revolutionary thought, the claim's very existence offers clear evidence of how, far from blindly following their counterparts in Iran or Iraq, the Indian Shiʻa have perpetually conceived themselves as developing their own religious traditions and literatures *in situ*, and as having meaningful influence upon religious thought and leadership in the wider Shiʻi world.[69] Furthermore, this retrospective association within modern India of ʻAli Naqi's ideas with revolutionary Iranian Husainology has perhaps made his depiction of Husain all the more contentious. For the Shiʻa in India, as in Pakistan, the question over whether to regard the Ayatollahs of Iran or the *mujtahid*s of Iraq as ultimate spiritual exemplars and political guides has become one of the most contentious debates of recent decades, with major Indian clerics having been widely, and simplistically, pigeonholed as followers either of Khomeini and his successors at Qom, or of Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i and his successors at Najaf.[70] It so happens that some later members of ʻAli Naqi's Khandan-i Ijtihad clerical lineage, and other *maulvi*s linked to them, have been more associated with the former, and the apparent confluence of ʻAli Naqi's and Khomeini's Husainology is often informally cited as evidence of this apparent alliance.

We see, then, how *Shahid-i Insaniyat*'s afterlife has been complex and contentious. At first, an apparently trivial remark relating to Husain's thirst became a focus for competing claims to supremacy among Lucknawi scholarly families. Later, since the 1980s, the text has become embroiled within a parallel debate over the status of Iran and Iraq as competing poles of spiritual leadership for global Shiʻism, and their relevance within India. But running through both of these sagas is a roughly comparable, and unresolved, question: that of the appropriateness of the dissemination of Husain's message beyond the Shiʻi community. Some, like ʻAli Naqi (and for that matter

---

69 C. f. Jones, *Shiʻa Islam*, pp. 20, 227–228.

70 The question of the extent to which the Shiʻa of the Indian subcontinent practice *taqlid* (deference or discipleship) towards *marja*ʻs (exemplars) outside of India at all is a highly nebulous one, even before we consider whether any such transnational ties link them to Iran or Iraq. For some discussion of an arguably increasing, if still highly marginal, Iranian influence among the Indian Shiʻa, see Vali Nasr, "The Iranian revolution and changes in Islamism in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan", in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, (eds.) Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Washington DC, 2002), pp. 327—354. For further reflections on the issue of the influence, or otherwise, of Iranian clergy and intellectual traditions within modern South Asian Shiʻism, see Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, "Third wave Shiʻism: Sayyid ʻArif Husain al-Husaini and the Islamic revolution in Pakistan", in this volume.

Khomeini, ‘Ali Shari‘ati and most other Iranian revolutionary ideologues) have pursued more ecumenical perspectives on the Karbala message, seeking common ground within and beyond the global *umma* based on a shared moral vision of a righteous revolution against tyrannical despotism. Others have favoured a more exclusivist, maybe even sectarian trajectory of reading Karbala, less willing to compromise Shi‘ism's distinctive reading of Husain's ordeals and the belief in the custody of the tradition by the Shi‘a alone. It is perhaps the depth of these debates, rather than any individual claim within *Shahid-i Insaniyat* itself, which has ensured the text's enduring controversy.

Conclusions: Husain and humanity

This article has shown how, drawing from an inherent flexibility and adaptability embedded within the Karbala paradigm, ‘Ali Naqi' was able to formulate from the 1930s to the 1940s a distinctive Husainology that has since been endlessly influential within, and arguably beyond, South Asia. At its heart lay a fresh construct of Imam Husain's selfhood built around his worldly agency rather than intercessionary powers, and a message of temporal action that meant he was a figure to be emulated rather than merely commemorated. Equally, and perhaps most significant about this work, was the attempt to open Husain's significance to all of humanity, breaking not only the social *sayyid-mominin* (leaders and followers) distinctions within Shi‘ism as lived in north India but reaching out externally to other Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The organisation of the "Husain Day", linked to but also existing independently of ‘Ali Naqi's literary endeavours, highlighted the political insinuations to be drawn from his work on *shahadat*, which at particular historic junctures seemed to find intellectual touchpoints with political protest movements, including at first Gandhian *satyagraha*, and later the Iranian revolution.

Perhaps the conceptual core for understanding ‘Ali Naqi's Husainology is his notion, and frequent evocation, of the idea of *insaniyat*. Like the English word "humanity" in its post-Enlightenment usage, *insaniyat* in ‘Ali Naqi's writing carried a similar array of meanings and insinuations. It conveyed at once two points about Husain's message: its sense of individual moral perfection and compassion, and its universal relevance to all of mankind in a way that transcended creed and culture. It is notable, also, that similar ideas of *insaniyat* were being simultaneously evoked by Muslim intellectuals across the spectra of persuasions and politics. Sayyid Qutb, for instance, would within a decade or two of ‘Ali Naqi's experiments be using

insaniyat with a similar dual meaning, to denote both an "ethical" vision of personal moral accomplishment, and also the sense of that message being "universally human".[71] Recent scholarship on modern Islamic political thought, meanwhile, has equally emphasised how the rubric of "humanity" has been used by an array of modern orators as a means of transgressing exclusively Islamic theological bounds, and universalising their claims within a global framework of reference and communication.[72] The language of *insaniyat*, then, is one that reveals ʻAli Naqi's proclivity for experimenting with social and political ideas of global currency, many of which were being simultaneously applied by Islamic intellectuals across the spectrum in very different, and equally innovative, ways.

In addition to its tremendous influence in South Asian Shiʻism, the book's further legacy has been one of abject controversy. It has been used as a platform to debate not only contemporary religious authority among the Indian Shiʻa but also the meanings of Husain's sufferings, the appropriateness of the dissemination of the Karbala story, the suitability of *shahadat* as political message and also the relevance of Iranian models of Husainology for the South Asian Shiʻa. While associations with such debates have doubtless added to the text's controversy, they have also further ensured its fame and durability. Indeed, the contestations generated by this text simply further affirm a clear and ongoing reality: that regardless of the efforts of ʻAli Naqi' or any of a number of other twentieth-century Shiʻi scholars to document a final and authoritative rendition of Imam Husain's life, the Karbala story remains a thing of multiple meanings and heterogeneity, whether in or beyond South Asia.

---

71 William Shepard, "Sayyid Qutb's doctrine of 'Jahiliyya'", *International Journal of Middle East* Studies, XXXV, 4 (2003), p. 526.

72 Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity, passim*. To pick up on an example appearing throughout this article, Devji notes how during the Islamic revolution in Iran, "it is startling how often the words human, humanity and human being were used … humanity seemed to have replaced properly theological identifications like Shiʻism, Islam or even religion in general, so that … it becomes a synonym for all three" (pp. 28–29).

5 Universalising Aspirations

Community and Social Service in the Isma'ili Imagination in Twentieth-century South Asia and East Africa

Soumen Mukherjee

This article traces the contours of a historical entanglement that characterised the socio-religious life of the worldwide Isma'ili community in the twentieth century.[1] The setting for this historical process, and the changes that it

This article was written during my fellowship (2011–2013) at the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin and funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Earlier versions were presented at Royal Holloway, University of London, and as an invited talk at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich. I wish to thank my hosts, the audience and especially Michel Boivin, Katrin Bromber, Faisal Devji, Ulrike Freitag, Kashshaf Ghani, Hussain Jasani, Justin Jones, Kai Kresse, Wafi Momin, Ali Usman Qasmi, Dietrich Reetz, Francis Robinson, Dietmar Rothermund, Amrita Shodhan and Ben Zachariah for their insights. The arguments made here, however, do not necessarily reflect their views.

1 The Isma'ilis are a minority group among the Shi'a, diverging from the numerically greater Twelver (or Ithna 'Ashariya) Shi'a on account of a contending belief in the rightful Imam (in Shi'i belief, a divinely ordained leader of the Muslim community after the Prophet). The Isma'ilis believe in Isma'il b. Ja'far as the successor of Ja'far al-Sadiq (the sixth Imam of the Shi'a), thus deviating from the Twelver Shi'i faith, since the latter regard Musa al Kazim as the rightful successor. The Isma'ilis are further subdivided on the question of a rightful successor to Imamate: those supporting al Must'ali as the successor of al Mustansir Billah came to be regarded as the Must'alis (or Bohras in the Indian subcontinent, further split up into different subsections: for example, the Dau'dis, the Sulaimanis, the 'Aliyas etc.); the other group regarding Nizar as the successor, and with belief in a living Imam, came to constitute the Nizaris (the Khojas of South Asia and Africa). Interestingly, however, the nomenclature of "Khoja" and "Isma'ili" increasingly came to be used interchangeably, especially from the times of their 48th Imam Aga Khan III, Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III (1877– 1957), as is documented in his large corpus of works. For a useful overview, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990). For an overview of the Isma'ilis in India, see Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat: An Exploratory Study of Bohras, Khojas and Memons* (Delhi, 1989). For a more recent contribution on the global Isma'ili community, see Farhad Daftary (ed.), *A Modern*

unleashed, is colonial South Asia and East Africa, where the Indian-origin Khoja Isma'ilis comprised a diaspora, somewhat akin to the complex composite model put forward by Engseng Ho that informs the present study.[2] The diasporic Khoja Isma'ili community of the western Indian Ocean rim represents a classic example of the appropriation of the late colonial configurations of capital, cultural and ideational exchange. It is among the diasporic Khoja Isma'ilis, again, that Ithna 'Ashariya Khoja Isma'ili secessionism — defying the authority of the Imam and laying the foundations of a Khoja Shi'a Ithna 'Ashariya community — bore implications probably greater than anywhere else. This, in the process, led the hereditary Imam of the Khoja Isma'ilis, Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1877–1957; Imam from 1885 to 1957), to resort to taking the first steps in laying down community protocols that over the decades came to define the Khoja Isma'ili community's relations with the Imamate, while also instilling a new sense of community ethics. An array of coeval historical forces in South Asia and East Africa in late colonial times thus marked the first steps towards the development of an Isma'ili identity, dovetailing with certain understandings of Isma'ili ethics of social service and activism under Aga Khan III and thereafter, Shah Karim Aga Khan IV (1936–; Imam since 1957). The transition from Aga Khan III's Imamate to that of Aga Khan IV marked a further expansion of the scope of this project of social service, feeding as it did into grander developmental ventures invoking at once the sophisticated rhetoric of corporate management, academics and policy making, with the Hazir Imam Aga Khan at the apex.[3]

History of the Isma'ilis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community (London, 2011).

2 Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XLVI, 2 (2004), pp. 210–246, provides a conceptual reorientation in diasporic studies by emphasising the importance of universalist aspirations and principles in the emergence of identity in disparate diasporic contexts. We shall shortly elaborate this in fuller detail. Jonah Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern: Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community* (Chapel Hill, 2011), in his effort to understand what he calls "Isma'ili globalization" and "the community's emergent transnationality", emphasises "the role of capital and empire in the transformation of human communities into diasporas and other forms". *Ibid.*, p. 13. In doing so, he further draws upon the multi-sited methodological innovations consolidated in Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, 2006). The Bohras, the Khojas and the Memons from western parts of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, it should be mentioned, migrated to East Africa especially during the colonial times, although their commercial links predate the colonial intervention.

3 The Imam of the Khoja Isma'ilis is called the "Aga Khan" and is also referred to as the "Hazir Imam", the Imam of the Time.

An outcome of this complex shift is now best encapsulated in a network called the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), operating in the sphere of social service and "development". It consists of agencies with different mandates — from education to microfinance and rural support programme, and from humanitarian assistance to health — established at different times in the twentieth century. The key terms 'development' and 'network', however, go no further back than the 1980s, reflecting a gradual but definitive shift towards an all-encompassing wider conceptualisation of development and a rather flexible organisational framework operating under the general leadership of the Hazir Imam, Aga Khan IV, as the 'Chairperson'. A key vehicle for universalising the liberal humanitarian discourse of social responsibility under the leadership of the Isma'ili Imamate, the AKDN thus seeks to "realise the social conscience of Islam through institutional action",[4] and working "to improve the welfare and prospects of people in the developing world, particularly in Asia and Africa, without regard to faith, origin or gender".[5] At the same time, the claims of an Isma'ili ethics under the leadership of the Hazir Imam, i.e. Imam of the Time, the Aga Khan, simultaneously give the whole structure a specific Isma'ili imprint. Instrumental to this structure, as literatures produced by the AKDN underscore, are "the Ismaili community with its tradition of philanthropy, voluntary service and self-reliance, and the

[4] See http://www.akdn.org/about_akdn.asp. This social activism, based on a wider social conscience of Islam seen through the lens of an Isma'ili worldview, makes a strong argument for a plural understanding of Islam, underlining the "inappropriateness of referring to the Shia–Sunni divide, or to interpretational differences within each branch, in the frame of an orthodoxy-heterodoxy dichotomy, or of applying the term 'sect' to any Shia or Sunni community". See http://www.akdn.org/about_imamat.asp#evolution.

[5] See http://www.akdn.org/about.asp. One wonders if this entire endeavour and its framework of ideas are not part of a wider discourse of a particular "secularism", as suggested by Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003). The distinctiveness of the idea of secularism is argued to be the fact that it "presupposes new concepts of 'religion', 'ethics' and politics and new imperatives associated with them". *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2. It is largely this new understanding of religion and ethics that gives much of the global Isma'ili philanthropic endeavour its secular outlook — a structural development that is also related to the very formation, in modern times, of what have been referred to as "religious internationals". See Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, "Introduction: Rethinking religion and globalization" in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (eds.) Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (Basingstoke and New York, 2012), p. 14. The emergence of religious internationals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are thus said to entail the "reforging of religious identities in transatlantic or imperial encounters, and the emergence of new forms of sectarian politics, philanthropy and the press", at the very heart of which is certain "*mobilization* and *religiously inflected voluntarism*" (italics in original). *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

leadership and material underwriting of the hereditary Imam and Imamat resources".[6]

This discourse of social service with religious underpinnings has to be seen against the backdrop of a wider historical experience of the Isma'ili (and more specifically the vanguard Indian-origin Khoja Isma'ili) community, and its leadership.[7] Emerging out of prolonged legal processes in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, the experience involved at one level forging together a host of universalist values, of common good and social service, eventually manifesting in a range of organisations. In doing so, it produced a common language of social engagement to be emulated by a very disparate community across the globe, gradually and increasingly brought within the rubric of an Isma'ili denomination that acquired new socio-political meanings over the twentieth century.[8] At another level, this remoulding of an Isma'ili identity, gradually subsuming in the process the various ethnic and socio-political differences at the global level into an overarching denominational formation, also involved universalising and standardising certain denominational aspirations and traits. This created, in the process, a distinctive sphere within the larger rubric of Shi'i Islam and indeed the Muslim community at large, while asserting a discernible Isma'ili position in that balance. This translocal-to-global journey thus reflected some of the key traits of religious internationalism of the times: the reconfiguration of religious identities; the emergence of organised global philanthropy; and religiously underpinned social activism and voluntarism with the potential to develop an increasingly "secular" face.

The present attempt to trace the ideational genealogy of this ethical system as well as the precursors of the Imamate's contemporary developmental ventures, I should qualify, should be seen as neither an exhaustive account of the AKDN, nor a definitive commentary on the community-specific internal issues.[9] This is only a preliminary effort to chart the broad contours of some

6 See http://www.akdn.org/about_akdn.asp. It is the Imam who "ensures the balance between the *shariah* or the exoteric aspect of the faith, and its esoteric, spiritual essence" and "according to the needs of time and universe". See the section on "Principles of Shiism" at http://www.akdn.org/about_imamat.asp#evolution.

7 The privileged position of the Indian-origin Khoja Isma'ilis within the multi-ethnic global Isma'ili community, even in contemporary times, is testified to by their continued predominant presence in the Aga Khan's inner council of advisers in his secretariat in Aiglemont, France. See Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern*, p. 57.

8 I use the expression "denomination" merely as shorthand for the worldwide Isma'ili community, while denuding the expression of its Christian specificities.

9 A besetting problem often encountered by scholars in writing a history of the community's internal life is one of limited accessibility to sources. Indeed, A. K. Adatia and N.Q. King,

key aspects of the historical process, the historical matrix within which it took shape and their wider and more recent implications. The larger historical context gives us the canvas necessary to understand the nature of the shifts and nuances of the process that is characterised by certain connectedness, both vertical and horizontal, stretching back to the colonial period and linking the community's experiences in South Asia and parts of East Africa. And, indeed, it is mostly the South Asian-origin Isma'ili population from Africa that constitutes the bulk of the contemporary Isma'ili community in the global North, thanks to successive waves of secondary migration to Europe and North America in the wake of the political excesses that entailed post-colonial African nationalism in many of the African countries.

This article has three sections, before it moves on to the concluding part. In the first segment I invite the readers to engage with some conceptual issues that inform this study. The second seeks to foreground the question of the connectedness that had historically tied the Isma'ili experience in late colonial South Asia and East Africa together. It suggests that this history of connectedness drew substantially upon the diasporic experience of the community in Africa, a process that also requires us to reconceive the very conceptual frame of 'diaspora'. The last part of the article tries to identify the key aspects of the process through which a somewhat more concrete Isma'ili identity was forged, in more recent times bringing together an essentially composite global Isma'ili community. This is where we also see the relevance of both the discursive frame and vocabularies of social service in the Isma'ili imagination and their lived experience across the globe.

Some conceptual considerations

In an effort to understand this process, this article takes its cue from a line of scholarship on global social structures of the Isma'ilis that focuses on the intersection of rational humanism, modernisation and institutional proliferation in contemporary times, often seen as an age of global assemblages.[10] The most recent *oeuvre* in this vein, one focusing on the

"Some East African Firmans of H. H. Aga Khan III", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, II, 2 (1969), pp. 179–191, suggest that such restricted circulation and lack of direct references often run a potential danger of "some resultant misinterpretation of meaning". *Ibid.*, p. 181, fn. 2.

[10] Central to the emergence of global assemblages, Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, 2006) argues, are the changing notions of community membership and the relationship between citizens and the state even as the "exclusive authority, both objective and subjective, of national states over people, their

Isma'ilis of contemporary Tajikistan and northern Pakistan, looks for the antecedents of the contemporary deterritorialised Isma'ili formations in the early ventures of Imam Aga Khan III, resulting in the development of an Isma'ili "corporate community".[11] Accordingly, it is suggested here that the diasporic experience of the Khoja Isma'ilis in the western Indian Ocean sphere was no simple linear process and, therefore, has to be problematized. The dynamics of a range of forces characterised this process: internal schisms on the basis of contesting claims to Islamicity, a thriving associational life promoting contending denominational norms and reformist claims, and a dynamic conversation across the western Indian Ocean. Even though the diasporic Isma'ili community on the African soil was of Indian origin, there had been a substantial number of cases of adaptation to and accommodation of local African elements, probably most noticeably through marriage patterns, and resulting in some degree of socio-cultural diversity. This article further suggests that the institutional endeavours of social service under Aga Khan III were not only supported in various ways by the British Empire but were part and parcel of a larger discursive frame of "imperial Islamicate" that informed the Indian-origin Muslim diasporic experience on the western Indian Ocean in late colonial times.[12]

This complexity, therefore, is an outcome of a concatenation of a range of intertwined forces. The first of these forces relates to the activation of universalist humanitarian ideals and norms buttressed by languages of legitimation claiming to have their roots in an Isma'ili denominational inspirational repertoire. Second, in the process it fed into an increasing emphasis on the humanitarian ideational bases of an Isma'ili identity in a highly competitive religio-social sphere. Finally, discourses of social service and improvement also provided the validating idioms for the Isma'ili claims to leadership in the Muslim social sphere in Africa.

---

imaginaries, and their sense of belonging" gradually recedes, facilitating "the entry of non-state actors into international domains once exclusive to national states". *Ibid.*, p. 299.

11 Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern*, especially Chapters 1 and 2. His overview of the diasporic experience is perhaps best summarised in his underlining its relevance in the emergence of an Isma'ili "welfare" discourse and the "process of connecting subjects through service"; *Ibid.*, p. 46. The expression "corporate community" occurs in H. S. Morris, *Indians in Uganda*(Chicago, 1968), p. 34.

12 I borrow the expression from Nile Green, "Africa in Indian ink: Urdu articulations of Indian settlement in East Africa", *Journal of African History*, LIII, 2 (2012), pp. 131–150. Green elaborates the emergence of a discourse of Africa as "an imperial and Islamic settlement zone". His case study of Indian travelogues provides an important index of this civilisational narrative, "a sophisticated conjunction of imperial and Islamic claims to East Africa in which some Indians felt able to participate as Muslim imperial citizens". *Ibid.*, p. 133.

It is out of the crucible of this complex dynamic process that a holistic developmental discourse with a certain religious inspiration as its cornerstone — as though a trademark of the Isma'ilis, first in South Asia and East Africa but gradually across the world — emerged. The inclusive developmental philosophy that the AKDN signifies — marking this translocal to global passage — exemplifies in effect a wider understanding of the subject, one in which the nomenclature of 'development' denotes a constellation of ideas going beyond the predominantly economistic interpretation that characterises Cold War discourses on 'development'.[13] By the translocal dimension of this project of social service and activism I refer to the Khoja Isma'ili experience in parts of South Asia and East Africa, especially in the early twentieth century. "Translocality" as a conceptual framework provides an intermediate ground for understanding historical processes connecting different localities and their implications which are neither necessarily global in scale, nor connected to specific global moments. Furthermore, the concept also pays particular attention to local and regional empirical realities amid otherwise overarching homogenising developments.[14] In the present case, South Asia and East Africa happened to be the sites that witnessed the earliest of the experiments with developmental endeavours as well as a tradition of systematic *jama'at* (Khoja

[13] See Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History* (New Delhi, 2012 [2005]), especially the Preface for an outline of a "developmental imagination", encapsulating a cluster of cognate ideas on the theme, as opposed to statist developmentalism. Cf. Ashis Nandy, *Bonfire of Creeds: The Essential Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 313–318, for a study of the religio-cultural dimensions and their wider implications for the developmental agenda. According to Nandy, "development does not annihilate cultures; it merely exploits cultures to strengthen itself", *Ibid.*, p. 319. Based on the present study of the developmental worldview of the Isma'ilis, I suggest that it is probably more important to see them in terms of mutual constitutiveness (as opposed to exploitation of one by another), and in the process seek to retrieve the immense possibilities that the religio-cultural complex encapsulates. In doing so, I seek to provide a corrective to the tendency of subscribing to a sweeping generalisation that downplays the multifarious complexities of the religio-cultural *topos* and, in turn, reduces it to a category to be exploited by the grand narrative of developmentalism.

[14] For a conceptual manifesto, see Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, "Introduction- 'translocality': an approach to connection and transfer in area studies", in *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, (eds.) Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen (Leiden and Boston, 2010), pp. 1–21. In invoking the specificities of regional processes and forces, the "translocal" perspective also redresses some of the overdrawn homogenisations implicit in globalisation theories that tend to conceal the unevenness of different processes and linkages between different territories, as noted by scholars such as Frederick Cooper in "What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective", *African Affairs*, C, 399 (2001), pp. 189–213.

congregation) constitutionalism, both under the aegis of Aga Khan III.[15] The corpus of *jamaʿat* literature — *jamaʿat* rules and regulations and constitutions[16] — first emerging in the early twentieth century, and comprehensible partly as response to specific secessionist developments within the community in East Africa, has gradually come to define the community's internal organisation and relations, providing one with a lens through which to get a clearer picture of the community-specific issues and the ensuing conversations.

When Shah Karim Aga Khan IV succeeded his grandfather Aga Khan III to the Imamate after the latter's death in 1957, he inherited a community spread across vast stretches of the globe, large parts of which were then undergoing, or were soon to experience, decolonisation with very varied and acutely region-specific socio-political implications. These changes in historical *milieu*s had their imprint on the social policy of the Imamate. The resultant reappraisals brought about, in their process, crucial shifts in the Imamate's social policy and establishing new contours of social engagement and its idioms. The steady emphasis from the 1960s onwards on founding and/or consolidating a host of organisations (either newly established, such as the Aga Khan Foundation in 1967, or restructuring the ones already existing in different forms) that gradually went on to constitute the bedrock of the Aga Khan Development Network, has to be seen as part of this larger historical process. It is also in this context that the imperative of addressing audiences from both within the community of the Ismaʿilis, as well as beyond them has to be seen. It is a declared emphasis on the latter aspect, i.e. reaching out to a much wider audience beyond the Ismaʿili community, that most notably distinguishes the AKDN and its component bodies from the pre-AKDN organisations. All this, however, did not involve a dilution of the Imami Ismaʿili identity, with the Imam Aga Khan combining his role as spiritual leader with far wider social responsibilities, which continues to operate in its specific form within the larger Muslim community. In other words, central to this Imami Ismaʿili identity is the importance of the spiritual and temporal role of the Imam, the latter coming to the forefront increasingly since the times of Aga Khan III, and especially under Aga Khan IV.

---

15 For a recent useful study of this religio-legal and constitutional tradition, see Zulfikar Hirji, "The socio-legal formation of the Nizari Ismailis of East Africa, 1800–1950", in *A Modern History of the Ismailis*, (ed.) Daftary, pp. 129–159.

16 It is important to note — as Hirji, "The socio-legal formation of the Nizari Ismailis", pp. 146–147 shows — the terminological difference, because it is only as late as 1946 that the word "constitution" first appears in the title alongside "rules and regulations". Furthermore, only in 1962, under Aga Khan IV was the word "constitution" used in the title while the expression "rules and regulations" was dropped.

Towards a conjoined history – I

While colonial South Asia was the crucible of certain social welfare programmes and progressive developmental visions among the Khoja Isma'ilis that characterised what contemporary commentators would call a version of liberal Islam, many of the practical experiments were part of a broader maze of connected historical developments that linked colonial South Asia with its diasporic Khoja Isma'ili community in different parts of East Africa. It is this conjoined nature of a host of socio-religious experience that gives the broader historical process its salience, laying the foundations of the contemporary global Isma'ili community, and its specific socio-religious ethical framework. Furthermore, the flexibility that characterises the community's socio-political orientations, while albeit remaining dedicated to a specific denominationalism, also emanates from the didactic instructions of Aga Khans III and IV from at least the late colonial times in the Afro-Asian arena. The Indian Ocean as a category in itself with a focus on the transoceanic experiences of its various networks is well researched.[17] The cumulative achievement of this substantive corpus of scholarship is perhaps best summarised in the paradigm which conceives the Indian Ocean as a diffuse "interregional arena" rather than a rigid 'system', a sphere of human interactions with an immense "depth of economic and cultural meaning".[18] Increasingly — and perhaps this is more relevant for the present paper — scholars have also drifted towards understanding the nature of connections

[17] The key issues in the field, though not centrally important in the present discussion, can nevertheless be summarised, with the help of some indicative examples which may help one better appreciate the nature of transoceanic networks and dialogues. Michael Pearson, "Littoral society: the case for the coast", *The Great Circle*, VII, 1 (1985), pp. 1–8, made a strong case for not seeing the Indian Ocean as a region shaped by a commonality or structure. K. N. Chaudhuri, in *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985) and *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990) draws upon Fernand Braudel's approach and sees the Indian Ocean as a space for human transactions, both temporal and spatial. In doing so he sees the Indian Ocean as a matrix within which to engage with comparative studies of civilisations. Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of the People and the Sea* (Delhi, 1993) sees the Indian Ocean as a world that had its very distinctive and heterogeneous forms of "cultural diffusion and interaction" p. 3. More recently, the idea of the Indian Ocean as "a space on the move" has come to the forefront, underscoring thereby long-term historical processes. See Brigitte Reinwald and Jan-Georg Deutsch (eds.), *Space on the Move: Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Berlin, 2002).

[18] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge M. A. and London, 2006), p. 6.

between the societies on the seaboard, both on the Indian and the East African coasts, from different perspectives and with varied implications. The quest to understand the nature of relations between the peoples on both sides of the Ocean, in both precolonial and colonial times, elicits a range of possibilities: from relations gravitating around trade and commerce, sometimes with an emphasis on a persisting "Asian" agency in the colonial times,[19] to socio-religious exchanges,[20] to analyses of civilisational discourses.[21]

While sensitive to these wider aspects, I suggest that studies of specific socio-religious communities present on both sides of the Ocean may actually best illustrate the dynamics of some of the above issues. The history of the Khoja Isma'ilis in western India and the Khoja Isma'ili expatriates in parts of East Africa, as argued below, shows a complex combination of connectedness and divergence, the outcome of a dialectic of a range of forces: the specificities of the two regions; the experience of the Khoja expatriates in East Africa contributing in part to a somewhat different form of nationalist expression and imagination during the course of the nationalist movement in the subcontinent; and above all the strong leadership of first Aga Khan III and after 1957, Aga Khan IV. Indeed, as history of the global Isma'li community unfolded over the twentieth century, one can scarcely overestimate the centrality of religious leadership in Khoja Isma'ili socio-religious life, and the

19 For a good overview of the commercial realm, in a period that overlaps with that under review here, see Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian capital in the age of European domination: the rise of the bazaar, 1800–1914", *Modern Asian Studies*, XXIX, 3 (1995), pp. 449–554. Ray argues that the Indian and Chinese commercial and financial networks stretching from Zanzibar to Singapore never really lost their identity as "a distinct international system. . . in the larger dominant world system of the West", *Ibid*., p. 554.

20 Recent studies exploring the intersection of socio-religious life and commerce in the Indian Ocean seascape include, for example, Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (London, 2010). On the nature of the religious landscape in western India during the nineteenth–twentieth centuries and links with the Indian Ocean networks see, Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (New York, 2011). Green traces the broad contours of late colonial Bombay's religious landscape and brings out its connections with the western Indian Ocean. With a compelling use of metaphors like "religious economy" that buttress the case for individual choices in "religious consumption", Green underscores the plural and competitive nature of the religious terrain in late colonial Bombay.

21 For example, Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2007) suggests that far from a colonial periphery in the British Empire, India was the ground from which peoples, ideas, goods and institutions all radiated outwards. See below for elaboration with reference to Aga Khan III's position on this in particular.

nature of their political engagements across the globe, sensitive at the same time to the regional specificities.

In this understanding of diasporic experience which, I argue, conditions in no small measure the historical complexities, I take my cue from Engseng Ho's path-breaking work on the subject. This idea of diaspora — one that Ho calls the "British model", drawing his empirical data from a case study of the Hadrami Arab diaspora in South East Asia — is to be seen as different from the more conventional version of the concept, as illustrated by the Jewish example. The British, according to Ho, were not like ethnic minorities with particularistic visions: the British diasporic experience, that took the form of an empire, hinged on the activation of a cluster of universalist principles and claims, and not least building institutions that sustained such universalist aspirations. Ho argues that much like the British model, the diasporic minority of the Hadrami Arabs developed a corresponding universalist aspirational model, one that assumed the shape of religious mission paralleling a systematic assimilation into the local society, attracting at the same time their brethren from the Arab homeland, and maintaining rather resiliently their mobility across the Indian Ocean through trade, pilgrimage etc.[22] In what constitutes a rewarding addition to works on the Indian diasporas on the Indian Ocean, Lakshmi Subramanian in a recent work has drawn upon Ho's arguments. Her study of the Chulias — a subsection of the Marakkayar mercantile community originally from the Coromandel coast in South India — in South East Asia resonates similar views on mobility and diasporic experience but translated into the Indian-South East Asian context.[23]

The Khoja Isma'ili case on the eastern shores of Africa — and indeed in general the global Isma'ili community with its disparate ethnic, economic, social and political backgrounds — reveals, furthermore, identical resonances. The Khoja Isma'ili community in East Africa, though essentially of South Asian origin, entered into regular assimilative practices in local African

[22] Ho, "Empire through diasporic eyes". On the phenomenal resilience of the Hadramis amid all sorts of changes in socio-political dispensations, see Ulrike Freitag, "Reflections on the longevity of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean", in *The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?*, (eds) Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (Leiden and Boston, 2009), pp. 17–32.

[23] Lakshmi Subramanian, "Commerce, circulation and consumption: Indian Ocean communities in historical perspective", in *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*, (eds) Shanti Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal (New York and London, 2010), pp. 136–157.

society, as recorded from the late nineteenth century onwards, if not earlier.[24] The enduring nature of the variegated life experiences that emerges out of this composite form is further driven home by more recent anthropological explorations that show that amid discourses of community cohesiveness under their religious leadership, a certain community fragmentation, discernible in the realm of religious practices and performance, still persists among the Aga Khani Khojas, distinguishing the expatriate communities from the natal groups in India.[25] In the African scenario it is crucial to note that Indians in general and Indian Muslims and/or Khoja Isma'ilis in particular were also urged by personalities such as Aga Khan III to think in terms of a moral project, one in which the Indians and Indian Muslims/Isma'ilis were seen as carriers of improvement and progress. This derivative discursive scheme of trusteeship, reflective of a wider imperial vision of a three-tier civilisational pyramid — with the white masters at the top, the coloured Indians occupying the middle zone and the Africans the bottom — vested the Indians with the moral responsibility to facilitate progress in backward African societies, promoting some degree of nationalist fervour.[26]

To this discourse of moral commitment to social activism, Aga Khan III added the element of religion. The connection between religious inspiration and social activism could probably be seen as part of a wider discourse of self-affirmation that swept nineteenth- and twentieth-century Islamic culture in South Asia, marking a shift from the "other-worldly" to "this-worldly" piety.[27] For Aga Khan III, an understanding of Islam with strong

---

[24] Hatim M. Amiji, "Some notes on religious dissent in nineteenth century Africa", *African Historical Studies*, IV, 3 (1971), pp. 603–616 attributes the "paucity of females of the Khoja caste" as the major force behind marriage with local women. *Ibid.*, p. 606. A range of socio-economic push and pull factors resulted in a spurt in East Africa's Khoja population between the 1850s and 1870s.

[25] Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (London, 2007), pp. 18–19. And yet a shared belief in specific denominational traits brings them all under a common rubric of religious identity.

[26] For Aga Khan III's views on prospects of Indian colonisation in East Africa, see The Aga Khan, *India in Transition: A Study in Political Evolution* (London, 1918), Chapter XIII, esp. 127 ff. Also see James R. Brennan, "Politics and business in the Indian newspapers of colonial Tanganyika", *Africa*, LXXXI, 1 (2011), pp. 42–67, especially pp. 46–47; cf. more generally, Green, "Africa in Indian ink".

[27] See Francis Robinson, "Religious change and the self in Muslim South Asia since 1800", in his *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 105–121. Also, Francis Robinson, "Other-worldly and this-worldly Islam and Islamic revival: a memorial lecture for Wilfred Cantwell Smith", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, XIV, 1 (2004), pp. 47–58.

humanitarian inspirational underpinnings gave direction to the whole venture since, according to him, "genuine Islam is in perfect agreement with reason", ensuring material, social and spiritual welfare through a "co-operative Muslim enterprise".[28] Wedded to the received discourse of three-tier civilisational schema, this social-activism-oriented Islam required the Indian Muslims "to work for the uplift of all Muslims of indigenous [East African] origin"[29] and, as Aga Khan III noted in a conference in Mombasa, "give Islam a lead here [East Africa] until it is possible to see the day that in a meeting like this, this chair is occupied by an African Muslim".[30] While such improvement required "permanent organisation", it also called for an all-round development through building educational institutions: pan-Islamic universities, somewhat on the lines of Aligarh, for instance.[31]

That this went far beyond creating traces of India in Africa is testified to by Aga Khan III's general stance on the question of flexibility and adaptation.[32] His consistent exhortations towards accommodation, ranging from marriage relations with local women[33] to instructions to adapt to new conditions, were nevertheless underwritten by the retention of Isma'ili traits — most importantly the belief in the guidance of the Living Imam — as the key identity marker in the case of the Khoja Isma'ilis. The idea of adaptation and flexibility in general, celebrating compositeness and cultural pluralism, was central to Aga Khan III's philosophy of social engagement, something he

---

[28] Prince Aga Khan (III) and Zaki Ali, *Glimpses of Islam* (Lahore, 1954? [1944]), pp. 70–71.

[29] This formed part of his reply to the address presented by the Tanganyika Muslim Association, Dar-es-Salaam, 22 July 1945. See K. K. Aziz (ed.), *Aga Khan III, Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Volume II, 1928–1955* (London and New York, 1997), p. 1206.

[30] See Aga Khan III's reply to the address of welcome from the East African Muslim Conference, Mombasa, 16 June 1945. *Ibid.*, p. 1197.

[31] While the need for a "permanent organisation" was underscored in the address mentioned above, the emphasis on pan-Islamic educational institutions occurs in Aga Khan III's reply to the address of welcome from the (Second) East African Muslim Conference, Mombasa, 27 July 1946. See Aziz, *Aga Khan III, Volume II*, p. 1225.

[32] In invoking the expression "India in Africa", I mean a rather superficial approach to see far deeper encounters as a mere linear engraftment of Indian models on African contexts. I do not intend to trivialise the thoughtful collection of essays, exploring outcomes of cultural encounters and cross-fertilisations across the western Indian Ocean rim, in a volume with a similar title, viz. John C. Hawley (ed.), *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2008).

[33] However, on the question of marriage with locals, one wonders if Aga Khan III's urgings were not, at least in part, a retrospective validation of what the Khojas in East Africa had been doing for decades. See above, fn 24.

believed to be integral to Isma'ilism throughout his life. In his own words: "Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid".[34] The Indians in general were thus urged not to think of making financial gains in a new country only with the idea of taking it back to India,[35] and the Isma'ilis in particular were enjoined to be loyal to the country of their residence.[36] As part of such concrete measures, the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS), established in 1945 in Mombasa by Aga Khan III, sought to propagate a more organic idea of unity among the Muslims on the continent. It funded the establishment of mosques, schools, scholarships, catering also to the needs of Africans, and such projects as the Vasini Island Water Reservoir.[37] The discourse of adaptability was thus evidently coupled with Isma'ili denominational sensibilities under the Imam's leadership, and perhaps also valorised at the same time a discourse of the Indian Muslim, and more specifically, Isma'ili superiority. The question of denominational specificity in particular had historically been crucial in determining the community's relations with the Imamate. This history stretches back to some early twentieth-century developments in East Africa that affected the community there as well as in South Asia. Thus, the reason to reiterate the East African Khoja Isma'ili example is the very fact of their being part of a disparate diaspora — somewhat in the sense that Ho conceptualises it — whose experience of identity formation was bound up with processes of defining community membership rules and not least the emergence of religiously inflected ethics of social service.

[34] Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga KhanIII, *The Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (London, 1954), p. 185. For an outline of this philosophy and its socio-political implications see, *Ibid.*, pp. 184–191. The fluidity also meant a corresponding flexibility in matters of community governance, ranging from "highly developed and civilised administrative system of councils" in British, French and Portuguese Africa to community leadership based on kinship patterns in parts of Central Asia. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[35] See the summary of two lectures by Aga Khan III given before the Ismaili community in Mombasa, 1–7 April 1926. K. K. Aziz (ed.), *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Volume I, 1902–1927* (London and New York, 1998), p. 802.

[36] See, for example, Aga Khan III's speech at the dinner of the Aga Khan Students' Union, June 1951, London. Aziz, *Aga Khan III, Volume II*, p. 1278.

[37] Robert G. Gregory, *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy in East Africa: The Asian Contribution* (New Brunswick and London, 1992), p. 53. Gregory adds that one of the key aims of the organisation had been to further the conversion of Africans into Islam, though the result was rather disappointing, *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94. However, even its philanthropic efforts were often received sceptically by the Africans. August H. Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Order in Tanzania* (Minneapolis, 1980), p. 91, shows how the organisation was discredited on the ground that the Indian-origin Isma'ilis dominated it.

At the core of these developments lay schisms within the community and occasioning in the process a series of responses from the Hazir Imam Aga Khan III that went on to define the nature of the community's relationship with the Imamate. These responses were both ideational, with a discourse of voluntary social service and the Imam's apex position in providing guidance, and organisational, in the form of *farman*s (commands from the Imam to his followers) and rules of community governance. Indeed, it was first and foremost the challenges posed by a section of the East African Khojas, leading to the breakaway Ithna ʻAshariya Khoja Ismaʻili faction that spurred Aga Khan III to set out the rules and regulations for the community in 1905, published in Zanzibar for the first time. The 1905 example was followed by similar initiatives elsewhere, in South Asia and other parts of Africa, aimed crucially at containing further similar challenges. These developments came to condition the socio-political (upholding the view of adaptability) and religious orientation (safeguarding Imami Ismaʻili denominational sensibilities) of the community vis-à-vis others: ethno-religious groups and political dispensations. These developments, to begin with, were thus of translocal import, straddling the western Indian Ocean. However, they gradually came to bear global significance as the community spread or, as in the case of post-Soviet Central Asia, facilitated closer links with groups previously connected to the ecumene through only symbolic skeins of engagement and, perhaps more tangibly, through the disbursement of taxes to the Imam.

I hope that the on-going discussion has brought out at least two key factors. First, it has underlined the immediate importance of the East African case that occasioned the Imamate's intervention in the form of setting certain community codes and a protocol that created ripples, first in a translocal sphere, though gradually producing, by 1986, an internationally applicable Constitution under Aga Khan IV. Second, it has highlighted the importance of the composite and assimilative nature of the Khoja Ismaʻili diaspora in East Africa that betrayed not only a combination of certain universalist aspirations and denominational specificity but had also actually been centrally important in the early experiments with a kind of community governance that the Imamate gradually developed and replicated elsewhere.

Towards a conjoined history – II

Recent scholarship has shown how the succession of Aga Khan IV to the Imamate after the death of Aga Khan III was closely connected with, and

furthered by, British interests in a fast decolonising world, augmenting the hereditary authority of the Imam and creating in the process a rubric of liberal ethics.[38] Faisal Devji emphasises that the Isma'ili mode of governance — accentuating the Imamate's state-like form, with bureaucratised elites serving the Imamate, the diplomatic status enjoyed by the Imamate and its representatives in different parts of the globe, and furthermore with its constitutions, flag and anthem — emulates the British model of indirect rule.[39] For Devji, the remarkable aspect of "the project of development among Ismailis" lies in the way it became dominant, "transforming or even replacing properly religious ideals and practices with its language of improvement", creating in the process "a development bureaucracy".[40] Under Aga Khan IV, Devji adds, this involved a virtual reinvention of his role as a religious leader by "internationalizing it through projects of cultural and economic development in the Muslim world and beyond" while presenting him as "the face of liberal Islam in the West".[41]

The transition from the Imamate of Aga Khan III to that of Aga Khan IV was marked by a gradual process of internationalisation, a process that integrated or systematically incorporated regional bodies into greater schemes. The ideational bases of these widening ripples are sometimes seen through the lens of 'encounters' of cultures, as Aga Khan IV did in a 1994 speech, making a specific case study of Tajikistan. Tajikistan, according to him, represents the meeting ground of three distinct and rich cultural traditions: "the Western world" offering its ideals of democracy, private institutions and liberal economics; "the Muslim world" offering "deep roots in a system of values, emphasising service, charity and a sense of common responsibility, and denying what it sees to be the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives"; and "the ex-Communist world", with a history of economic failure but significant investments in social welfare, the status of women and forging social cohesion. Speaking in the shadows of the collapse of the Communist

---

[38] Marc van Grondelle, *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire and Islam* (New York, 2009).

[39] Faisal Devji, "Preface" to Van Grondelle, *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era*, pp. ix–xvi.

[40] *Ibid*., pp. xi–xii. Even the nomenclature used in the context of the AKDN's organisational arrangement is instructive: for instance, the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM), one of the key AKDN bodies, has its own Board of Directors while His Highness the Aga Khan (IV) is its "Chairman". See http://www.akdn.org/agencies.asp. Also, the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, established in 1977, has its "Co-Directors" and "Governors", though at the apex is the Imam Aga Khan IV, once again styled "Chairman". See http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104418.

[41] Devji, "Preface", p. xv.

bloc, Aga Khan IV found the increasing number of participants (in this process) to be the most distinctive feature of these historical encounters.[42] This in effect amounted to opening up new terrains of engagement and with new possibilities and, not least, I should perhaps reiterate, new understandings of community membership in what can perhaps be called an era of global assemblages, characterised by the activism of non-state actors in spheres once monopolised by the state. In the process, new forms of connections were forged with different regions and societies which, though adhering to the Isma'ili creed, had historically had their own ethno-cultural particularities.

The process of this transformation was thus acutely sensitive to the changing socio-political formations and to a whole gamut of temporal, spatial and societal specificities,[43] and hinged upon a superimposition of certain models and improvisations on pre-existing structures developed under Aga Khan III. The discourse of social responsibility and welfare among the Khoja Isma'ilis that developed under Aga Khan III — with his early initiatives in the fields of education and health in particular on both sides of the western Indian Ocean — was in turn conditioned in large part by a longer historical process originating in the Khoja community's internal reformist critiques in nineteenth-century Bombay. These critiques went on to shape, from at least the 1860s onwards, the nature of communication that ensued between the pro- and anti-Aga Khan establishment, lending the reformists a language with which to uphold those values of civic life and liberties which they accused the Aga Khan (i.e., Aga Khan I, 1804–1881) of subverting.[44] The very language

42 "Commencement Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan [IV] at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology" (Cambridge, MA, USA); see http://www.akdn.org/Content/665/Massachusetts-Institute-of-Technology.

43 The element of sensitivity to historical contexts is further borne out by the reinvigorated developmental endeavours in post-Soviet Central Asia, an area which was hardly ever visited in the Soviet era by the Aga Khans. A meticulous study brought out by the Ismailia Association of Pakistan on the tenth anniversary of Aga Khan IV's Imamate, Sherali Alidina, *Ten Eventful Years Of Imamat H. R. H. Prince Karim Aga Khan Imam-e-Zaman* (Karachi, 1967), thus does not mention a single recorded trip by Aga Khan IV to what used to be the USSR. Earlier, in his 1954 memoirs, Aga Khan III noted that no deputations came from Soviet Russia, nor were there communications with the Isma'ilis in Sinkiang, Kashgar and Yarkand. He believed however that the Isma'ilis there were not persecuted. See Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs*, p. 183.

44 Amrita Shodhan, *A Question of Community: Religious Groups and Colonial Law* (Calcutta, 2001), pp. 3, 82–116, shows how the disputes were cast in communications about "public issues". Making a case study of Aga Khan III's career, Teena Purohit, "Identity politics revisited: Secular and 'dissonant' Islam in colonial South Asia", *Modern Asian Studies*, XLV, 3 (2011), pp. 709–733 traces the development of liberal Islam within the rubric of broader debates of religious deviance, liberal ethics and socio-political activism.

of the Aga Khan's defence, therefore, was conditioned by these reformist critiques, providing the Aga Khan's establishment with a vocabulary to emulate.[45]

While the 1866 Aga Khan Case established a Shiʿi identity of the Khojas with the Aga Khan as the spiritual head,[46] from the 1870s onwards internal differences within the Shiʿa group exposed it to further schisms, eventually splitting the community into the Imami Khoja Ismaʿilis under the Aga Khan's leadership and the Twelver Ithna ʿAshariya Khojas. Also from the 1870s, certain voluntary social activism sponsored by the Twelver Shiʿa Ithna ʿAshariya Khoja faction became more visible vis-à-vis the Aga Khani version of Imami Shiʿi faith, thus adding a further dimension to the already complex Shiʿa–Sunni Khoja divide. Symptomatic of the Twelver Ithna ʿAshariya Khoja public life in Bombay was a thriving associational activism that promoted Ithna ʿAshariya Khoja beliefs and practices and set a pattern of voluntary service to that effect.[47] In nineteenth-century East Africa on the other hand, the pioneers of the early philanthropic activities were rich Ismaʿili merchants like Tharia Topan (1823–1892) and Allidina Visram (1851–1916). Topan started building the Jubilee Hospital in Zanzibar. In a remarkable display of inter-denominational cooperation, his sons Musa and Gafar divided their estates according to the Sunni *shariʿa* (religious law): Gafar made endowments for a Sunni mosque, and Musa for a Sunni *madrasa* (religious seminary).[48] Visram is said to have established the first "non-denominational" school for Indian children in Mombasa, and Sewa Haji Paroo (1851–1897) is credited with having founded one of the earliest hospitals in Bagamoyo in what is

[45] Though a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of the present article, I should add that E.I Howard, the Defence Counsel of Aga Khan I in the 1866 Case, devoted substantive parts of his defence speech to rehabilitate the humane credentials of the Aga Khan and of the Shiʿi faith and Ismaʿilism in general. See E. I. Howard, *The Shia School of Islam and its Branches, Especially that of the Imamee-Ismailies. Being a Speech delivered by Edward Irving Howard, Esq., Barrister-at-Law, in the Bombay High Court in 1866* (Bombay, 1866).

[46] *Advocate General* v. *Muhammad Husen Huseni*, (1866), 12 Bombay High Court Reporter (Bom. H. C. R.) 323. See for the judgment, A. A. A. Fyzee, *Cases in the Muhammadan Law of India and Pakistan* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 504–549.

[47] "List of Political, Quasi-Political & Religious Societies, Sabhas, Anjumans & Labour Unions in the Bombay Presidency & Sind for the year ending June 1920", Home Department, (Special), File 355 (74) II/1921, Maharashtra State Archives, provides a list of the *mehfels* (associations). Hardly any of them ever engaged in any political activities, while the chief exception in a limited sense was the *Khoja Shia Asna Ashari Volunteer Corps*, composed of Ithna Ashariya Khoja youths dedicated to "keep order at political meetings and processions". *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[48] Abdul Sheriff, "The records of the 'Wakf Commission' as a source of social and religious history of Zanzibar", in *Islam in East Africa: New Sources*, (ed.) Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (Rome, 2001), pp. 27–45, p. 41.

now coastal Tanzania.[49] None of them, perhaps to some extent contrasting with the Bombay example, are known to have been overtly critical of the Aga Khan's establishment. This is not to suggest that the reformist rhetoric in Bombay — either from the Sunni Khojas, or from the Ithna ʻAshariya Khojas — provoked any knee-jerk reaction, producing any immediate readymade discourse of social responsibility, or for that matter the highly organised welfarist and developmental endeavours that subsequently became the hallmark of the Aga Khani Ismaʻili socio-religious world view. They did, however, condition to an appreciable extent the development of a vocabulary of social commitment, voluntary service and a social policy that in the long run characterised much of Aga Khan III's public career. The early educational initiatives, tied up with discourses of community development and providing a cohesive language, were centrally important to this project.

Much of the operational aspect of community development also depended on the way the community was conceptualised in the first place. Amid a general scenario of contested religious nationalisms in South Asia, as I have argued elsewhere, for Aga Khan III this meant two different but inter-related layers of engagement, sensitive, on the one hand, to the practicalities of South Asia's Muslim *qaum* (nation), and on the other, to the denominational specificities of the Ismaʻilis.[50] But it was above all the reformist-welfarist projects of Aga Khan III, especially in the spheres of education and health care, starting from about the early twentieth century in South Asia and East Africa, which formed the organisational bases of much of the later developmental ventures. Thus the history of the Aga Khan Education Services (one of the various agencies of the AKDN), the earliest schools of which were founded in the early 1900s in Mundra and Gwadur in India and in Zanzibar about the same time, followed by scores of them in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, drives home the coeval nature of developments in South Asia and East Africa.[51] The appeal to universalist values such as education was inextricably linked to the development of community spirit. Thus even though Aga Khan III contributed the bulk of the expenses in the early years, as the community grew prosperous he expected the locals to match his grants.[52] One can imagine that

[49] Malise Ruthven, "The Aga Khan development network and institutions", in *A Modern History of the Ismailis*, (ed.) Daftary, pp. 189–220, espcially pp. 191–192.

[50] Soumen Mukherjee, "Being 'Ismaili' and 'Muslim': Some observations on the politico-religious career of Aga Khan III", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, XXXIV, 2 (2011), pp. 188–207.

[51] See the introductory section in the Aga Khan Education Services website: http://www.akdn.org/akes.

[52] See Gregory, *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy*, p. 114.

this financial policy in educational administration went a long way towards instilling a sense of belonging, something in which the community could clearly see its own stake and active involvement rather than just being passive receivers.

A sense of the Isma'ili imprint in such educational administration, at least in the early stages, can be derived from a volume commemorating 60 years of "Ismaili education" in Kenya, and indeed to some extent in East Africa in general. Thus until 1905, school teachers in all towns and villages were responsible to the *Mukhi* (treasurer in a Khoja *jama'at*). After 1905, when the Isma'ilis in Africa received their first set of rules and regulations, school committees, albeit still answerable to the *Mukhi*, took over the administration. In rural areas Local Education Boards supervised by local Ismailia Councils were established, while in urban areas Provincial Education Boards administered schools under the supervision of the Ismailia Provincial Council.[53] From the 1950s, however, this Isma'ili community exclusiveness gave way to larger initiatives incorporating other Muslim communities and Swahili-speaking Africans.[54] The Madrasa Early Childhood Development Programme for instance — launched in the early 1980s, and benefiting over 54,000 children in Mombasa, Kampala and Zanzibar, and training over 5,000 teachers and 2,500 school committee members — has to be seen against this backdrop.[55]

This widening trend indicates certain shifts in the discourse of social service and the organisational restructuring that in part also mirror the gradual evolution of the Aga Khan Development Network, with its wider project of addressing the interests of the non- Isma'ilis. As mentioned, this umbrella organisation with two key expressions, "development" and "network",

---

53 See Zulfikarali Mawani, "A brief survey of the development of Ismaili education administration from 1905–1945", *Commemorative Issue, 1977–1978: Sixty Years of Ismaili Education in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1977–1978), pp. 19–21, for a useful overview.

54 In this shift, Tanzania led the way. See Paul J. Kaiser, *Culture, Transnationalism and Civil Society: Aga Khan Social Service Institutions in Tanzania* (Westport and London, 1996), pp. 79–97. Kaiser adds that the decline in Isma'ili population in the country provided a general background for "expanding Ismaili conceptions of community beyond their traditional communal orientation", *Ibid.*, p. 82. The earlier exclusivism was by no means one of a kind though. For the better part of the colonial period denominational differences among the Indian Muslim population doggedly resisted any effort at standardisation of religious education in key sites in East Africa, such as Zanzibar. See Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th Century Zanzibar*(Leiden and Boston, 2009), 224 ff.

55 The figures are from the 25th anniversary official report. See http://www.akdn.org/Content/210.

came to be used from the 1980s onwards, reflecting an all-encompassing connotation of development and certain flexibility in organisational structure balanced with a degree of centralisation with the Imam at the apex. Indeed, the gradual establishment of a range of bodies with different mandates — the Aga Khan Academies (AKA), Aga Khan Education Services (AKES), the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM), the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED), Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS), the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), Aga Khan Planning and Building Services (AKPBS), FOCUS (Focus Humanitarian Assistance) etc. — complementing each other within the AKDN, and placed under the apex authority of the Imam as the Chairperson underscores a critical balance. In reactivating this wider inclusive discourse, the Imamate in effect connects to a holistic normative approach to human development and social welfare while reinventing its role in the social sphere. Furthermore, the importance attached to local and/or regional specificities by the Imamate both under Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV is no less significant. This reflects, as well, some key concerns about developmental endeavours that some social scientists have been emphasising for some time.[56] Development programmes and global philanthropy thus hinge upon a wider discourse of sustainability, involving both urban and rural populations, and marginalised groups. "Age old systems of religious, tribal or inherited family authority" and "local identities", as Aga Khan IV points out in a recent speech echoing much of the contemporary sophistications in the field, thus constitute the bases on which to carry on development, promoting an all-round "sustainable progress" in diverse societies.[57]

In its efforts to reach out to the broader society beyond the Isma'ili community, the AKDN is not "denominational", even as religion provides the inspirational basis and the Hazir Imam stands as lynchpin in the whole structure.[58] Thus in one single webpage of the AKDN, the umbrella

---

[56] Thus in an influential work, James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London, 1998), p. 6, points to "the indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability" as crucial factors for the success of any developmental venture.

[57] "Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan [IV] at the Global Philanthropy Forum", 23 April 2009, Washington DC; see http://www.akdn.org/Content/736/Global-Philanthropy-Forum-Washington-DC.

[58] Ruthven, "The Aga Khan Development Network and institutions", p. 190, sees the AKDN as neither a non-government organisation nor faith-based charity but suggests a combination of traits of both. I suppose it is worth remembering that it is always the outsider who is concerned about these labels. Julia Berger, "Religious nongovernmental

organisation is said to be dedicated to "improve the welfare and prospects of people… without regard to their faith, origin or gender"; but the centrality of the Imam Aga Khan's role is buttressed on the basis of a certain understanding of "Islam's ethical tradition", one in which "religious leaders not only interpret the faith but also have a responsibility to help improve the quality of life in their community and *in the societies amongst which they live*" (my emphasis).[59] Understandably, the role of religious leaders does not end with religious guidance but has to address a wide range of worldly issues. The Hazir Imam Aga Khan, as the apex Imami Isma'ili authority, thus has an immense role to play. Such convergences are also played out in a different manner, interchanging the categories of Islam and Isma'ili, reflecting two different, but intertwined, layers of religious consciousness and/or belongingness.

The intersection of these two strands is perhaps best marked in the sphere of the educational curriculum of the London-based Institute of Ismaili Studies' *ta'lim* programme.[60] The aim is to evolve an Islamic curriculum, even as a specific Imami Isma'ili version, foregrounding the Imami Isma'ili values and norms runs centrally in this endeavour right from the pre-school to primary education level. The curriculum initiates the pupils into the Aga Khan's social welfare activities as well, in addition to his spiritual role.[61] It is important to note, however, that such educational enterprises, geared as they are to complement standard formal schooling, are basically meant for the Aga Khani Isma'ili children all over the world. The *ta'lim* curriculum thus acts as a cohesive force, uniting an essentially disparate Isma'ili community spread across the globe, otherwise fragmented along ethnic, socio-political lines.[62] The idea, therefore, is to bring up Isma'ili children with a set of

---

organizations: An exploratory analysis", *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, XIV, 1 (2003), pp. 15–39, at p. 21 aptly notes that many of such organisations that we might call "religious NGOs" are reluctant to identify themselves with such a label.

59 See http://www.akdn.org/about.asp. This awareness of social service and social activism is instilled systematically through the education of children, underpinning it with a specific set of socio-religious ethics.

60 For a general overview of curriculum from the "pre-school" (4–6 year-olds) to "primary six" (11–12-year-olds) levels, see the Institute's website: http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104853.

61 For instance, *Primary Five, Book Two: People Helping People* (London, 1997) introduces Isma'ili children to a general social awareness, its rich tradition of voluntary service and, above all, the wide-ranging social activism of the AKDN.

62 This consciousness about the pluralism that characterises the Isma'ili community across the globe is driven home by anecdotes of Isma'ili children from across the world, from Syria, Tajikistan, Iran to Pakistan and India, and to the USA etc. in *Primary Two, Book*

values declared to be Isma'ili and yet, at the same time, enable them to see themselves as part of a wider Muslim *umma* (community) and indeed the world at large – inculcating a strong sense of social responsibility. The history of the development of the *ta'lim* programme as an integral part, and indeed as one of the key vehicles of the Isma'ili community's group-specific socio-religious value-system, promises a highly interesting case for academic enquiry. This would also involve the study of the community's wider socio-religious history, its values and sensibilities, in a corpus of literature often garbed in a language that requires specific training to decipher, and therefore, should be best left to more qualified authorities. Suffice it to add here that such studies might bring fresh insights into our perspectives on the socio-political as well as religio-cultural history of the community.

However, the transition from the 48th to the 49th, i.e. the present Imamate, and the changes in social policy that it entailed — the diversification of developmental ventures, marking a passage from the translocal to the global — was not seamless. In the initial stages the process often involved negotiations with community elders for mobilising funds for larger developmental ventures.[63] Discourses of social justice and sustainability — with its manifestations in economic, social, and not least legislative spheres — are thus systematically wedded to those of religious inspiration and religious authority, while also drawing upon the participation of a community whose developmental aspirations gradually witnessed at once a diversification and horizontal widening of its sphere of activities. Encapsulated in the form of the AKDN, this basically meant an emulation of the pre-AKDN social welfare models with a substantial improvement on the organisational domain on a highly professional basis that holds together an array of agencies with diverse mandates in over 30 different countries across the globe, and addressing the needs of a much bigger section of population. For this much bigger audience, the significance of the Aga Khan's religious authority is for all practical purposes mostly symbolic — rendered possible furthermore through his styling as "Chairperson", in a corporate bureaucratic tone — while the services that his AKDN provides are very tangible, even opening up the AKDN's various

Three: Murids of Imam az-Zaman (London, 1994). For all this pluralism, the community is bound together in unity under the Imam Aga Khan, and through the relentless efforts of the *jama'ats*, striving towards spiritual and material progress of the community.

63 A little-known documentary, *The Living Camera: Aga Khan, A 1961 Film of the Young Imam*, captures some of these early moments of negotiations. Filmed in Europe and East Africa in 1961, but made available on DVD for the first time only in 2008, the film was made by a team of renowned documentary film-makers, Robert Drew, Gregory Shuker, D. A. Pennebaker and James Lipscomb.

social services to non-Isma'ilis. The AKDN's functioning often involves close cooperation with the governments of the various countries and/or federal states of countries where it is present, or even the local populations where it works.[64]

But while the discourse of social service became increasingly inclusive in nature, encapsulated in the AKDN, it never quite entailed an erosion of the Isma'ili community-specific activism. This is best reflected in the series of community regulations and constitutions, gradually augmenting the sections on social activism, community welfare and organisational aspects. Thus, even as a more inclusive developmental agenda was being worked out, especially from the 1960s, the 1962 Constitution published by His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Supreme Council for Africa, also part of the first set of protocols after Shah Karim succeeded to the Imamate, emphasises its concern for the community's religious and social welfare.[65] Furthermore, a range of "Jamati institutions" — also referred to as "Ismaili institutions" — cater to the various needs of the community members.[66] What we have here then is a case of division of responsibilities. Both drawing upon a certain religious inspiration, with the Aga Khan and his Imamate at the apex, albeit reconfigured as a corporate bureaucratic framework, this bifurcation between the AKDN and the *jama'at*-centric social service rests more with the target audience, and signifies not much of a difference in essence and spirit.

Concluding reflections

This article has sought to throw light upon some crucial complexities within a Shi'i community that illustrate the interlinked nature of its sensibilities

[64] For example Ruthven, "The Aga Khan Development Network and institutions", pp. 195–196, points out that the successful operation of the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme in East Africa depended upon the support of the Sunni Imams, who had to be convinced that the system would be compatible with Swahili cultural sensibilities. For an overview of the AKDN's partners (national governments, government organisations as well as private institutions), see http://www.akdn.org/partners.asp. A substantial part of the AKDN's funding also comes from various national governments, multilateral institutions and private-sector partners. See http://www.akdn.org/faq.asp.

[65] *The Constitution of the Khoja Imami Ismailis in Africa* (Nairobi, 1962). Cf., for example, the idioms of progress and prosperity for the community in the *Constitution of the Councils and Jamats of Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims of Pakistan* (Karachi, 1962), published by H. R. H. Prince Aga Khan Ismailia Federal Council for Pakistan.

[66] For instance the Aga Khan Social Welfare Board — as though replicating in its own way the various social welfare functions of the AKDN-affiliated bodies — is responsible for an array of social matters affecting the community of the Isma'ilis in particular.

of self-identity and certain wider and universal aspirations and values. The history of Isma‘ili philanthropy, its social welfare and more recently, grander developmental projects, presents a complex entanglement, best comprehensible when seen over *longue durée*. The complexities are part of — and were conditioned by, at least in the initial stages — the specific historical and socio-political formations in East Africa and South Asia over the length of the twentieth century. The Isma‘ili case shows some aspects of a conjoined history of community development, and discourses of reform and welfare facilitated by socio-religious actors straddling across the western Indian Ocean. It was first and foremost the schisms in East Africa that contributed to the formation of a system of protocol, in the form of written rules and regulations and constitutions, shaping the relations between the Imamate and members of the denomination drawn from a historically disparate background (although with the Indian-origin Khojas at the vanguard) and were soon replicated in South Asia. At the same time, they produced a new socio-religious and ethical basis. This is precisely where one also sees the relevance of historical enquiry that seeks to understand not only dialogues between the imperial metropolis and its colonies but also the multiple networks connecting different parts of what used to be the British Empire out of a shared imperial experience, albeit perhaps in different degrees and in different ways. While the Khoja Isma‘ilis had a complex diasporic experience in East Africa, they were — and I apologise for invoking a truism that I nevertheless feel has to be reiterated — not cut off from the rest of the world, least of all from their natal community in South Asia. Thanks to the different law cases in South Asia and East Africa, the Imamate's efforts manifested through systematisation of rules and regulations and subsequently constitutions, having the most dynamic character in the early twentieth century. However, and as suggested above, understanding this process requires no less than a virtual reconceptualisation of the diasporic experience. These developments — invoking first and foremost the fundamental questions of identity and religious authority — were carried out in no closed clerical circle but necessitated public engagement and invoked a range of universalist aspirations and principles, those of social responsibility and the creation of a common value-system and even the very idea of belongingness to society or a community.

The question of belonging to a community has to be emphasised in particular, because it is the sphere where there was also a specific Isma‘ili ethos at work, vis-à-vis a larger Islamic universalism and also other contending forces within the Shi‘a or the Sunni denominations. This intersection of the universal and the particular was mediated by the Imamate. At one level

this meant retaining specific Imami Isma'ili traits and its religiosity, even universalising its social values and attaching an Isma'ili logo to such values at another level but both subjected to a carefully balanced system headed by the Imam that has, over the decades, tended to develop a corporate profile. It is a structure in which the religious dimension is wedded to the trappings of a state, a system subject to the rules, regulations and constitutions of the community, and in which emblems like an anthem or a flag convey sublime symbolic messages. These forge a sense of an Isma'ili community under a religious leadership of their Imam who, and whose legates, are often accorded diplomatic status in different parts of the world. This article has sought to retrieve some of the key features of the historical circumstances and the process that marked this transformation, transcending translocal spaces and experiences and reaching out to global formations.

6 Muslims, Media and Mobility in the Indian Ocean Region
Two conceptions of Twelver Shiʿi Reform[1]

Shireen Mirza

Travelling headers and connecting print cultures

Attempts in thinking about the relationships between globalisation, media, transnationalism and Islam have sought to explore their effects on Islamic imaginaries and traditional institutions of authority.[2] These studies assume a framework that sees globalisation and transnationalism as part of the processes of western modernity, not adequately attending to the idea of religion as an alternate globaliser or a realm of sociality, in which economic, political and cultural networks are underpinned by shared identities. In contrast, links between Islamic practices and Muslim communities can be seen as forging transnational networks across localities, where the use of technology by Muslims in service of Islamic reform constitutes a moral universalism.[3]

[1] I am truly indebted to my supervisors at SOAS, Stephen Hughes and Edward Simpson, for their contribution to the Hyderabad research. I am also grateful to 'Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity' as well as 'Tata Institute of Social Science' for their contribution to the Mumbai research and in particular to Peter van der Veer and the participants of the 'Transcendence and Control in a Global Mega City' workshop for their feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Feedback from Justin Jones and the anonymous reviewers has also been extremely helpful in the writing.

[2] See D. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies", *American Ethnologist*, 19 (1992), pp. 643–655; F. Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print", *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (1993), pp. 229–251; and P. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London, 2001) as instances.

[3] By moral universalism, I refer to a transcendental system of ethics applicable to all people regardless of culture, religion, nationality or race. While doing so, I am arguing for a situated universalism or an everyday, practical context from which moral imperatives emerge.

The popular use of print and media technologies for Islamic proselytisation and reform could be seen to give rise to a different epistemic process that is associated with the willingness of a subject to adhere to traditions, producing what has been termed as pious subjectivities.[4] In the case of Indian Muslims the popular use of media also indicates exclusion from the dominant nationalist imaginary, for religious groups tend to use media rather than state processes such as law in seeking intervention. Further, the use of technology by Muslims to articulate an Islamic moral universalism, this chapter seeks to argue, is unlike a singular *telos* demonstrated by other universal claims, since it is underpinned by different goals, internal contestations and disparate trajectories within the often undifferentiated category of Muslims.

With this debate in mind, the following chapter describes two distinct trajectories of Twelver Shiʿi reform practices that deploy print and electronic media in the Indian Ocean region towards varying ends, as manifested by two contemporary Shiʿi organisations. World Islamic Network (WIN), the first of these, is an initiative that operates from the western India coastal city of Mumbai (Bombay). As described in greater detail later, WIN seeks to create a transnational religious market for Twelver Shiʿism by printing and distributing books, as well as running its own television channel where cultural programmes on Muslim culture and Islamic pasts are broadcast. The second reform initiative, Tanzeem, also circulates books, sermons and Islamic films on Twelver Shiʿism, articulating a transnational imagination that is linked to Iran and its politics. Unlike WIN, Tanzeem seeks through these activities to effectuate moral and material change within the local Shiʿi community in the inland Indian city of Hyderabad (Deccan).

The chapter seeks to show, first, that these different conceptions of reform articulate moral universalisms that are embedded in their respective local material cultures. Second, it argues that reformist ideas as propagated using media technology are affected by the different locales that make up this network, impacting upon the nature of Islamic discourse and its implications

4 Saba Mahmood explores a non-liberal ontology of the self by ethnographically drawing from an Islamic women's mosque movement in Egypt, to show that notions of individual freedom are not experienced in opposition to societal norms, as conceived in western feminist theory. Reflecting on the contours of such a subject, where varied configurations of personhood exist in its gestural and affective capacities, Mahmood posits the idea of a pious subject. Such a subject, she argues, acts upon herself through quotidian ritual practices in a manner that makes norms constitute her subjectivity, forming a distinct topography of the self under different conceptions of ritual within overlapping traditions of reasoning and moral formations. For more on this, see S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005).

for power and authority within this moral universalism. In doing so, the article gestures towards contrasting developments in the modern Shiʿi world, despite the propensity of different traditions of reform to use technology to mediate their message.

The material used here emerges from ethnographic studies amongst Twelver Shiʿi Muslims in Daru Shifa in Hyderabad's old city, as well as on Palla Galli in Mumbai's Dongri. Both areas consist of a high spatial concentration of Muslims of different occupational and sectarian groups, being commonly referred to as the 'Muslim quarter' of these respective cities.[5] In both cases, the ethnographic material is based on participant-observations and interviews of what has been catalogued in anthropological parlance as research based on the experience of being a 'native anthropologist'[6] in which the 'observer' and 'observed' belong to a similar cultural context and in this case also a shared religious context. The historical material against which the ethnography is interpreted is based on interviews, in which community narratives that describe a collective past in distinct ways are sought to be explored. Through this I have highlighted distinct aesthetics of the past, using also community records, such as autobiographies and souvenir publications passed on to me during these interviews.

In the case of Tanzeem, as this chapter will seek to show, ideas of reform use Islamic media to critique local practices of Shiʿism perceived as remnants of a local Muslim feudal culture in which public Shiʿi practices were patronised since the founding of Hyderabad city. This critique is directed against a dominant public culture of Shiʿism with deep historical routes in

[5] The ethnography in Hyderabad was conducted intermittently from 2006 to 2009, including a year of fieldwork residency in 2007 as part of my doctoral thesis on memory and space in Hyderabad's old city at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies. The Mumbai fieldwork was conducted during a six-month residency in 2011, with a follow-up two months of fieldwork in the summer of 2012 as part of a postdoctoral fellowship within the project called 'Urban Aspirations in global cities' partnered by Max-Planck Institute for the study (MPI) of religious and ethnic diversity (Gottingen) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai).

[6] I locate myself at the curious cusp of being the 'inside outsider', despite belonging in anthropological parlance as a native anthropologist, since difference between community trajectories while conducting fieldwork Mumbai as well as those involving gender differences where a woman anthropologist working in an Islamic *milieu* comes to be defined as an outsider or a 'non Hyderabadi' or not local, were both frames of differences assumed and at times articulated, despite the commonality of belonging to the same community. These field experiences established for me that the category of the 'native anthropologist' is formulated solely in relation to Europe and is perhaps not very useful when applied to non-western context.

state patronage by the Indo-Persian Qutb Shahi dynasty (1512–1687) that imagined Hyderabad city as an extension of Iran and declared Shiʿism as state religion. Further, a dominant Shiʿi public culture established during this time gained popularity as part of the local courtly culture within the predominantly Sunni Asif Jahi dynasty (1724–1948); notwithstanding a brief interval during the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's rule.[7] Besides critiquing the impact of this local history, as what Tanzeem understands to comprise an existing Shiʿi culture of patronage and nepotism, its reformist ideas are directed also against the perceived dilapidation of Islamic practices. This is a context in which the dominant Shiʿi public culture in Hyderabad was displaced after Indian independence, already hollowed by years of association as a princely state during the British Raj. After independence, patronage of these Shiʿi public practices was devolved to a host of Wakf bodies, which are managed and controlled by the erstwhile nobility with participation from the diasporic Iranian-Hyderabadi Twelver community. Tanzeem believes, then, that such practices have merely shifted from the patronage of the former princely state to the control of traditional community elites, including the existing local *ʿulama* or preachers. Using the internet and Islamic print media, the initiative looks to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran in a revivalist reading that aims

[7] Existing historical literature on the Shiʿi character of the Qutb Shahi dynasty has focused on the common participation of both Hindus and Muslims in Muharram commemorations, reading this period as one in which Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis took place in the pre-colonial Hyderabad context. See for instance S. Naqvi, "Cultural Synthesis in the Qutb Shahi kingdom", *Proceedings of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress* (Bab-ul-ilm Society, 1985) as an instance of this. Other studies of Shiʿism in Hyderabad have focused on Muharram practices as elaborating the following themes: sermonising traditions linked to the history of state patronage for Shiʿism in T. M. Howarth, *The Twelver Shîa as a Muslim Minority in India: pulpit of tears* (London, 2005); as popular religion in gendered settings with regard to the women's gatherings in D. D'Souza, "In the Presence of the Martyrs: The Alam in Popular Shiʿi Piety", *The Muslim World*, 88, 1 (1998), pp. 67–80; or neighbourhood communities that sustain processions and men's flagellation in D. Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (London, 1992). Shiʿi practices have also been studied as a performative tradition noteworthy for the popular confluence of local, Islamic and Persian cultures where the body in particular has been studied as a site of enacting Shiʿi theology, see R. K. Wolf, "Embodiment and ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram drumming", *Yearbook for Traditional Music* (2000) 32, pp. 81–116. Further, Shiʿi practices have been studied as a literary tradition that has generated narrative genres of lament and literary publics, in particularly becoming tools for political articulation in the colonial context in South Asia. Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford, 2006). These different perspectives on Shiʿi practices in Hyderabad have traced their popularity amongst the Hindus and the Muslim communities to the varying patronage of Shiʿi practices amongst the ruling dynasties in the region.

to bring politics back into Islam, questioning the historical shaping of Islamic tradition vis-à-vis the colonial disciplining that confines Islamic tradition to the private sphere. It therefore circulates discourses and images that re-read the battle of Karbala as a moment of insurrection, attempting to reform those local attitudes and aesthetics which it believes to be lodged in past cultural repertoires.

Displaying a very different relation to the past and a separate community trajectory are the Gujarati Twelver Khojas whose practice of Shiʿism could be seen as a subculture within Twelver Shiʿism. This Gujarati Khoja subculture continues to maintain its distinct cultural identity, being originally a Gujarati Hindu business community believed to have first converted to Islam to form the Shiʿi Ismaʿili Khojas, of which a section later broke away turning to Twelver Shiʿism, retaining its mercantile and other vernacular cultural forms. Whilst the Twelver Khojas have undergone dramatic shifts in faith, paralleled by movement of people between the areas of Bombay, Gujarat, Africa, the Middle East and the West in a diaspora,[8] paradoxically the maintenance of cultural traits has continued. A transnational public sphere has been forged through the circulation of print and visual technology between these regions in which Twelver Shiʿi authoritative texts are translated from Persian, Arabic, Urdu and English to Gujarati, Swahili and other local languages and contexts where the Khoja Twelver Shiʿas live. This print culture connects the Twelver Khoja diaspora, where religious monthly journals published in Gujarati circulate amongst the community. These journals are administered by welfare trusts that are funded through *khum*s and *zakat* (charity capital) with the aim of creating a religious market,[9] through which awareness about matters of faith and reform is sought to be spread.

[8] The population of the Twelver Khoja community is dispersed amongst countries like India (40,000) Pakistan (20,000), Africa and Indian Ocean Islands and more recently in Europe, Canada and the USA (15,000). In Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands, Khojas are dispersed into some fifty agglomerations located in more than a dozen countries. Apart from South Asia, the highest concentrations of Khojas are in Tanzania (11,000), Kenya (3,050), Madagascar (5,000) and Réunion Islands (1,400). See P. Lachaier, "Mapping the Gujarati Muslim Communities in Paris", in *Gujaratis in the West: Evolving Identities in Contemporary* Society, (eds.) A. A. Mukadam and S. Mawani (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 10–25.

[9] Nile Green's insights on the idea of a religious market as commercial economies and the ways in which it functions are useful here. Religious economies, he argues, function like commercial economies in that they are constituted as a market of customers, consumers, competition, religious products and services made available by firms. Conceived as a social and collective enterprise as well as interaction between people, it brings together a social dimension underlying for instance, careers of miracle-workers, prophets and thinkers. See N. Green *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the Western Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 27–28.

From this can be discerned two distinct models of circulation across the Indian Ocean that impact on the nature of reform practices. First, a centre and periphery model connecting Iran and Hyderabad amongst the mainstream Twelver Shiʿas, with distinct roots in an Iranian Shiʿism.[10] In this Iranian network of circulation, religio-political leaders from Iran play an important role in transnational Shiʿi politics and are looked to as figures of inspiration and emulation by the majority mainstream Twelver. The second model of circulation is formed around patronage ties where leaders from Iraq, held as charismatic figures, have locally embedded themselves in the activities and organisation of the Twelver Khoja. In exploring reform initiatives embedded in these different trajectories within the common *milieu* of Twelver Shiʿism, the article seeks nuanced conceptions of Islamic reformism that vary not only in their media pathways but also their conceptions of Islam and use of media to claim transcendence.[11]

My aim in telling these stories of movement of people, technology and charismatic leaders is threefold. First, I wish to stress inter-regional exchange

---

[10] My effort here is only to indicate the broad trends that link places and people: such as between the Twelver Khojas, the mainstream Twelver Shiʿa, the Iraqi Shiʿi establishment and Iranian Shiʿism.

[11] In seeking to articulate ways in which distinct localities are shaped by transnational Islamic networks, the chapter attends to theorisation of Islam in the Indian Ocean. The spread of Islam across the Indian Ocean between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, for instance, has been understood to have woven a pattern of economic and cultural unity that enables a discourse of the Indian Ocean as a coherent entity, often in contrast to the subaltern accounts of slave trade and forging of trade relations that enabled the development of capitalism in the trans-Atlantic. For instance, see P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1993). Among the elements of commonality that describe networks across the Indian Ocean, Islam with its religious activities, like Hajj, is seen to have forged oceanic patterns of circulation created through movement between the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and South East Asia. See, for instance, the works of K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990) and K. McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi, 1993). And yet, the idea that socio-religious Islamic networks between distant lands are symbolic of a unity in pattern and structure across the Indian Ocean has been questioned. The questioning of unity of circulating patterns via Islam within the Indian Ocean is done, for instance, by highlighting the migration of local practices and customs through a process that Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, employing Chaudhuri's notion of equivalence, understand as one where geographies of home are transposed and recreated in new setting. This process of migrating local customs within global Islamic exchanges, they argue, has led to competing forms of Islamic interpretation and rival forms of cosmopolitanism amongst people who travel to new places. See E. Simpson and K. Kresse (eds.), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York, 2008).

between spatially segregated populations and locales through Islam. Indian Ocean studies have focused largely on historical exchanges in the pre-modern and early modern periods, and more recently on histories of the modern era, highlighting connected histories.[12] The second objective is to revisit this idea of connected histories by ethnographically exploring the ways in which circulation through media technology takes place in the present, along continuing pre-colonial and early modern connections. I aim to demonstrate that media flows follow traditional patterns and community trajectories, in which movement of Muslims between places has led the way for technological use. Further, I argue that the historically determined routes of community migration impact the use of technology and the projects of reform it facilitates; as such, attempts to articulate a moral universalism through technology merely reinforce and re-connect plural Islamic transnational networks.

Finally, this chapter aims to complicate and critique a tendency to explain the effects of technology on the religious understanding of Muslims as one that will eventually undo the traditional structures of religious authority, in the context of modernism of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The use of technology, it has been argued, enabled independence for readers from the tutelage of *'ulama* through individual engagement with religious texts, thereby replacing custom and traditional structure by more democratic and ideology based engagement. Further, it has been posited that the increasing use of print technology will eventually lead to the rise of an urban Muslim reformist imagination circulated within a reading public that will enable direct contact with classical Islamic texts and a departure from intercessionary folk practices.[13] Such a trajectory of understanding of Islam in the modern world, as one that diminishes diverse 'local' Islams can be seen as deriving from 'Protestant', 'disenchanted' or 'globalised' frames, as opposed to an immanent theory of traditions.[14] In contrast to these disenchanted frames,

---

12 See S. Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3 Special Issue (1997), pp. 735–762; and more recently, S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in an Age of Global Imperialism* (Cambridge, 2005).

13 See F. Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print", *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (1993), pp. 229–251.

14 Unlike the historical meta-narrative employed by these perspectives that see developments within Islam in a uni-directional movement from custom to ideology, I would rather employ an immanent approach that studies tradition based on its own avowed norms and modes of practice. This would conflict with some concepts of rationality or 'scientific' approach to critical theory based on universal methods and criteria, by attending to popularly acknowledged and yet intrinsic forms of rationality within everyday practice.

particular strands of Shi'ism (such as Usuli) believe in following a *marja'* (learned jurisconsult), within the structures of *taqlid*: the emulation of living spiritual guides and leaders who provide new religious rulings based on the sayings and interpreted actions of the Imams. As such, while structurally Shi'ism maintains and follows the authority of its *marja's*, *mujtahids* and *'ulama*, there are distinct strands of modernity and reformism within Shi'ism that uphold what has been termed as an 'enchanted modernity'.[15] In this understanding of Shi'ism, the rational combines with the affective, textual with the charismatic, and the theological with the political.

Following Nile Green's observations on Bombay Islam, that newer religious productions in response to industrial and commercial growth need to be grouped together with customary Islam,[16] I emphasize the need to move beyond an understanding of modern developments within Islam as uni-dimensional, uniform or linear by attending to the development of custom, charisma and technology within Islam. In describing these overlapping technological and ritual networks, I seek to explore the complex and conflicting textures of Shi'i reformism that employ print technology and media for very different ends, despite their commonalities in aspiring for universalism within what could be joined together to draw up a transnational oceanic Shi'i geography.

The chapter is accordingly divided into three parts. The first describes the formation of a Twelver Khoja diaspora through a print-based public sphere, in which community journals in the local Gujarati language circulate conceptions of a distinct Khoja modernity, rooted in activities of funding, philanthropy and reform. The next section describes the formation of a print-based public in Bombay, through the reform initiatives of WIN run by Twelver Khoja businessmen. As a comparison with WIN and its use of technology, the third section describes Tanzeem's reform effort in Hyderabad.

The twelver Khoja Diaspora

The history of the Twelver Khoja Shi'as in Bombay, as recounted by members of the community, is constructed around the movement of reformist leaders from Iraq to Mumbai, due to whose efforts it is believed that local mosques and community welfare trusts were first set up, firmly establishing Twelver

15 L. Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (New Jersey, 2006).

16 For more on the argument, see N. Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the Western Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 242.

Khoja presence in Palla Galli in Dongri. The construction of this Twelver Khoja identity displays a distinct Khoja modernity, seen to derive from both its antecedents, in the sense that the Khojas are believed to have belonged to the Hindu Lohana caste before they converted to Islam in the fifteenth century, as it does from movement of people in search of new business prospects to distant lands, and the changes within community structures this entailed.[17]

Bombay's Mohammed Ali Road in Dongri became a major centre of Isma'ili Khoja settlement, with Khoja families migrating from Kutch and Kathiawar in Gujarat to establish business ventures that derived from an existing Gujarati mercantile culture. With the influx of Gujarati Muslims into the city after 1830, a Khoja cemetery, a chief community hall (*jama'at-khana*) off Samuel Street, and the mansion of Aga Khan I in the Mazagaon quarter, came to be established in the decades after the arrival of the Aga Khan I in 1848 to Bombay.[18] Later, Bombay also became the setting in which the drama of secession within the Isma'ili community played out; one of the many factors for this being the Aga Khan's move with the aim of connecting with the Isma'ili community in their new religious centre that is believed to have resulted in attempts to consolidate his authority over the community.[19] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various secessionist movements

[17] The converted Khoja families, as historians describe, came to uniquely identify themselves as Shi'i Muslims of the Nizari Isma'ili persuasion, who regard the Aga Khan as their religious and spiritual leader or the present Imam of the time. Both communities, the Isma'ilis and the Twelver Shi'as, believe in the idea of the Imamate as charismatic leadership, transmitted through blood of Prophet Muhammad to his descendants (*sayyid*s) from his daughter Fatima and son-in-law 'Ali. By virtue of direct descent, it is believed, spiritual gifts to interpret the Quran and provide authoritative guidance on all matters, religious or otherwise are passed on, constituting the basic premise of Shi'ism. Where the Isma'ilis (also called the Seveners or *sabiyyah*) differ from the Twelver Shi'as is first in branching out after the sixth Imam Ja'far Sadiq, following his elder son Isma'il. They also differ in their belief in the idea of the manifest Imam of the time (*hazir* Imam), while for the Twelver Shi'as the institution of the Imamate ends with the Twelfth Imam—the Mahdi or 'the rightly-guided one', who is believed, is present in his Occultation and will reappear at the end of time as the Mahdi. See S. A. Arjomand, "History, Structure, and Revolution in the Shi'ite Tradition in Contemporary Iran", *International Political Science Review*, 10, 2 (1989), pp. 111–119.

[18] Green, *Bombay Islam*.

[19] On more about the social change of the Isma'ili Khoja community and the secessionist movements staged in colonial Bombay, see J.C. Masselos, "The Khojas of Bombay: The Defining of Formal Membership Criteria during the Nineteenth Century", in *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims*, (ed.) I. Ahmad (Delhi, 1973), pp. 1–20; A. Mujtaba, *The Origins of the Khojahs and their Religious Life Today* (Bonn, 1936); and H. Papanek, *Leadership and Social Change in the Khoja Isma'ili a Community* (unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1962).

within the larger Isma‘ili Khoja community (known locally as the *moti jama‘at*) resulted in the formation of smaller Sunni and Twelver Shi‘i Khoja groups (called *nani jama‘at*).[20]

It was mainly the process of the breaking away of the Twelver Khojas from the Isma‘ili Khojas that gave momentum to the active movement of Twelver Shi‘i families and leaders across the Indian Ocean. Further, the impetus to gravitate towards Twelver Shi‘ism came from these journeys. An anecdote from the chronicles of Mullah Asghar ‘Ali, the late president of the World Federation of the Twelver Khoja *jama‘at*, is an instance. During pilgrimage to the sacred cemetery of Imam Hussain in Karbala (Iraq), a group of Khojas was asked if they had performed the Muslim pilgrimage of *hajj* (not a mandatory practice according to the Isma‘ili belief) in the presence of the Shi‘i *mujtahid* Shaikh Zain-ul ‘Abiddin Mazendarani. When the group was reprimanded for this ‘omission’, they requested for a leader from Iraq to be sent to Bombay.[21] This helped put in place a model that constituted patronage ties with Iraqi Shi‘ism through the migration of religio-political Shi‘i leaders, who were looked to as charismatic figures. Mullah Qadir Husein arrived in Bombay in 1872 at the behest of Shaikh Zain-ul ‘Abiddin Mazendarani, and remained in service for 27 years, becoming the founder of the Twelver Khoja community in Bombay. Seven years later, as community records state, Ayatullah Shaikh Abu’l Qasim Najafi, another ‘*alim* (knowledgeable leader) from Najaf, reached Bombay after his *hajj* in Mecca, in order to lead the Friday prayers.[22] At the request of the Twelver Khoja *jama‘at* at Bhavnagar (Gujarat), the ‘*alim* subsequently journeyed from Bombay to Bhavnagar and Mahuva in Gujarat to pursue missionary work there. He returned to Bombay in 1891 and led the first public Twelver Khoja congregation at the Iranian Shushtari *imambara*

[20] While writing about these secessionist movements, Ali Asani describes these developments as a story of negotiation and formalisation of identity that once drew from multiple identities that could be Sunni, Shi‘i, Hindu while being Isma‘ili, that is a story “. . . colorful and sometimes confusing . . . involving the courts of British India, murder and intrigue, excommunications and expulsions, and lots of money. It is the story of a community’s identity, once consisting of multiple strands, being narrowed in its scope as it entered the modern world, so as to better fit spaces deemed appropriate by new cultural and religious environments”. See A. Asani, “The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of their Own”, *Cultural Dynamics*, 13 (2001), pp. 155–168, for more on this.

[21] M. M. J. Asgharali, *An Outline History of the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri Community in Eastern Africa*. Paper presented at the Conference of World Ahlulbayt League (London, 1983). http://www.scribd.com/doc/93760455/A-History-of-the-Khoja-Community (accessed 20 July 2012).

[22] Mumbai Jama‘at, *Khoja Shi‘a Isnaahari Jama‘at Mumbai-India 1319–1419 A. H.: A Centenary Presentation* (Bombay, 1998).

in Dongri.[23] With his support, a piece of land was purchased in the Palla Galli area, adjacent to the Isma'ili *jama'at-khana* on Samuel Street, where the foundation of the Twelver Khoja mosque was laid. Three generations of leaders from this Najafi family led the community after the '*alim*, following their training in the *hawza* at Najaf.

Apart from the Iraqi Shi'i leaders, the newly-formed Twelver Khoja community coalesced around the memory of members from the community, who they believe were attacked and martyred by the neighbouring Isma'ili Khojas, including Haji Allarakia and Laljee Sajjan. In another instance, Abdullah Laljee, a survivor of one such attack highly-regarded for his sacrifice, is believed to have played an instrumental role in building the Khoja Twelver mosque in Palla Galli in Dongri. Among the stories of sacrifice that permeate the Twelver Khoja memory is the story Killu Khatau. Killu Katau's family migrated from Nagalpur in Kutch to Bombay in 1865. Killu is believed to have been sent to poison Mullah Qadir in the month of Ramazan. Instead, on hearing the Mullah preach and on reading his popular book *Chiragh-i-Hidayat* (*The Light of Guidance*), he is said to have become a devotee.[24] Harassed by the rival assassin group, Killu tried to escape to Zanzibar but got caught in a brawl and ended killing Hasan Mukhi, the chief of the Aga Khan. Sentenced to death for this killing, crowds outside Dongri jail are said to have heard him utter his last words 'Allaho Akbar', before he was hanged in 1878. Tales of his piety and devotion to Mullah Qadir during the legal proceeding and hanging are popular amongst the community. His brother Dharamsi Khatau left Bombay in 1880 with their parents, and the wife and daughters of Killu Khutau, journeying for a month in a *dhow* to Mombasa.[25] The long journey and the sadness of Killu's death is said to have led to the death of their father. Due to this, Dharamsi Khatau decided not to disembark in Mombasa and stayed on board longer till the family reached Zanzibar. He established Dharamsi Khatau and Co., which imported textiles from Germany, and proceeded to set up multiple branches throughout East Africa, including in Mombasa, Lamu, Malindi, Mazeras, Takangu, Kisumu, Bukoba, Nairobi and Meru, where the newly arrived Twelver Shi'as worked before establishing their own businesses.[26]

---

23 H. Qadir, *Memoirs of Mulla Qadir Husain Sahib*, trans. H. Prakash (Karachi, 1972).

24 *Ibid.*

25 See Z. Bhalloo *Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheris in Lamu and Mombasa 1870–1930* (2008), http://www.sikh-heritage.co.uk/heritage/sikhhert%20EAfrica/nostalgic%20EA/othe%20towns/khoja%20lamu%20mombasa%201.pdf (accessed 24 July 2012).

26 *Ibid.*

Similar tales of sacrifice permeate the collective memory of the community, according to which other persecuted and excommunicated Khoja families are reported to have left Bombay and Gujarat. Conditions of drought and economic hardships are also believed to have contributed to their decision to seek new trade possibilities in the colonial context of Africa. Encouraged by the blowing winds, during the North Eastern monsoons, many such families sailed from the ports of Mandvi and Porbandar towards East African shores in their *dhows*.[27] The story of Dewji Jamal, a rich merchant from Bombay who migrated to Africa, establishing trade links with Europe and India, and promoting Twelver Shi'ism amongst the newly arriving Khoja migrants, provides further insights on the connections between various locales that make up the diasporic community. Dewji Jamal was part of the Khoja group that travelled to Iraq from Bombay for pilgrimage, and on whose request Shaikh Zain-ul 'Abeddin Mazendarani sent Mullah Qadir to Bombay. An early immigrant from Bombay to Zanzibar, Dewji Jamal helped found the first Twelver Khoja *madrasa* in Zanzibar in 1881. In 1897, a mosque, a cemetery, and an *imambara* were established in Lamu, then the chief port of Kenya, with funds from his import company Dewji Jamals & Co.[28] Also another leader, Sayyid 'Abdul Husain Marashi Shustari from Iraq, was sent to the island, on Dewji Jamal's request to lead the growing number of Twelver Shi'as in prayer and in performing rites.[29]

Around the same time as the institution of the *madrasa* and mosque at Zanzibar, *madrasas* were also instituted in Mahuwa and Bhavnagar (Gujarat) by the pupils of Mullah Qadir.[30] Haji Ghulam Ali Isma'il was prominent amongst these pupils, translating, compiling and writing around 300 books on the theme of Islamic liturgy and ethics in Gujarat. Popularly known as Haji Naji, his contributions in Gujarati were extremely popular in Mumbai, Gujarat and Africa. In particular his translations (*tafsir*) of the Quran into Gujarati led to the proliferation of books on Twelver Shi'ism amongst the Khojas, transposing Shi'i Islam into the local imagination of the diasporic Twelver Khoja community. He translated, for instance, *Meraju Sa'dah* (*Prayers to Elevate*) and *Dua no Majmuo* (*The Book of Prayers*), popular especially in Bhavnagar. In 1892 he also started the Gujarati journal *Rah-i-Nejad* (Path of Salvation) from Bombay, which consisted of theological opinions, information

27 Asgharali, *An Outline History*.

28 Bhalloo, *Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheris*.

29 See S. S. A. Rizvi and N. Q. King, "Some East African Ithna-Asheri *Jama'at* (1849–1967)", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 5, 1 (1973), pp. 12–22.

30 Qadir, *Memoirs*.

on ritual performance, obituaries and news of members of the community. While the journal moved to Karachi after the Indo-Pak partition in 1947, it paved the way for similar community initiatives of journals published in the Gujarati language. For instance, one family has since 1988 published a Gujarati journal by the same name on Palla Galli, Bombay, covering apart from theological content, affairs of the community, including news of the *jamaʿat*, commemorations of death anniversaries of Imams, and obituaries. More recently, an *sms*-service of the same name was started across Bombay and Gujarat, which informs the Twelver Khoja subscribers about prayer and fast timings as well as about gatherings, congregations and cremations. Another instance of a Gujarati journal published by the Bombay *jamaʿat* is a monthly bilingual journal entitled *Isna ʿAshari* that carries content for propagation, interspersed by news and business advertisements of the community. It began in 1935 under the leadership of Ayatullah Shaikh Mohammed Hasan Najafi, who like his father arrived in Bombay from Najaf at the request of the Khoja *jamaʿat*. An office of the journal, run by a Twelver Khoja trust, continues to be located opposite the mosque on Palla Galli.

Publication of these religious community journals take place in commercial printing presses owned by members of the community, where the business infrastructure of the community members also provides the logistics to establish and maintain a print-based religious public sphere. Within the context of Bombay's proliferating publication market, these printing presses, set up as part of family businesses, have been operational since the early twentieth century. The *Isna ʿAshari* journal, for instance, has been published since 1947 at the Novelty Printers – a printing press owned by a Twelver Shiʿi Khoja family - on Bombay's Grant Road. Apart from family business infrastructures that enable the printing of these journals and Islamic books at subsidised rates, most of the publishing is undertaken by welfare trusts run by mostly Twelver Khojas.

In Africa, the Bilal Mission Muslim Trust is supported by *jamaʿat*s of different parts of East Africa, with two centres in Tanzania and Kenya. The Trust also runs 25 *madrasa*s in East Africa, which publish, translate and circulate books for propagation in local languages. The Bilal Mission Muslim Trust was set up in 1964 under the direction of Sayyid Saʿid Akhtar Rizvi, who was appointed Chief Missionary for his knowledge of Swahili and English, his training at Najaf, and also the marriage alliance with the daughter of the late Iraqi *marjaʿ* Ayatullah Sayyid Abu'l Qasim al-Khoei. The Mission started its first Swahili publication *Sauti Ya Bilal* (*The Voice of Bilal*)

for its Swahili readership. It also publishes an English periodical *The Light*, as well as several books in both Swahili and English.[31] The publishing of Islamic books commissioned by Bilal Muslim Mission is also done in Bombay in presses privately owned by members of the community. The printing press 'Crown and Ink', for instance, has been owned by a member of WIN since 1960 and takes orders to print Islamic books, including those commissioned by Bilal Mission Muslim Trust, in Swahili.[32]

Between 1946 to 1961, the *jama'at* of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar as well as Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Madagascar, Reunion, Mauritius and Somalia came together to form a federation of Twelver Khoja African *jama'at*s to support initiatives in Africa like the Bilal Muslim mission.[33] This development is in keeping with the role of the community organisation of the *jama'at*,[34] divided into committees and boards with specialised tasks, with the avowed aim of upholding the project of Shi'i modernity and reform. The activities of the *jama'at*, and welfare trusts operated by the Twelver Khojas include sponsorship programmes in the fields of health, education and housing as well as publication of accessible Islamic books in English and other local languages as a shared project of social and religious reform. As Lachaier describes, this federation of the African *jama'at* was replicated on a larger scale after the dispersal of the community to other parts of the world, particularly after the expulsion of the Ugandan Indians in 1972 and

---

31 Asgherali, *An Outline History*.

32 Some Swahili books published at Crown and Ink in Bombay include: *Medical Education in Islam: Treatment by the Imams* (*Elimu Ya Tiba Za Kiislamu by Matibabu Ya Maimamu*) by Al-Husain Istaam Na Abu Atab Abdullah Bistaam; *Several Provisions in Question Relative to the Mosque* (*Vipengee Kadhaa Katika Swala Ya Jamaa Na Msikiti*) by Shiekh Hasan Musa as-Saffar; *Islam and Quantity of Din* (*Uislamu Na Uwingi Wa Din)* by Ayatullah Shahid Murthadha Mutahhari, *Masnawi of Maulana Jalaalud-Din al-Rumi*, published by the Cultural department of the Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran, *Imam Ali* (A. S.) *Brother of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)* Review of History and Research on Shi'ism Volume I and II: *Learn to Read the Quran* (*Jifunze Kusoma Qur'an)* by Hamid Muhammadi.

33 See P. Lachaier, "Mapping the Gujarati Muslim Communities in Paris", in *Gujaratis in the West: Evolving Identities in Contemporary* Society, (eds.) A. A. Mukadam and S. Mawani (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 10–25.

34 Helena Basu translates the idea of *jama'at* as community/caste or brotherhood of spiritual specialists distinguished by spiritual kinship ties. See H. Basu, "The Siddi and the Cult of Bava Gor in Gujarat", *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, 28 (1993), pp. 289–300. The organisation of the Twelver Khoja *jama'at* could be traced genealogically to Khoja community organisations, in which elected elder members of the community are much like those held by various castes, where disputes are discussed and settled, including those related to marriage. See A. S. Asani, "The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of their Own", *Cultural Dynamics*, 13 (2001), p. 157.

the nationalist and decolonisation movements in Africa that triggered a second large-scale migration of the community to western countries and, to a lesser extent, Islamic ones.[35] As a result of this dispersal and a more widely spread diaspora, an umbrella confederation under the World Federation was established in London in 1976, in order to unify these dispersed *jama'at* as well as to provide services to the community. In particular, these include the publication and circulation of accessible Islamic literature in English and other local languages, ensuring the availability of informed religious authority as well as accessibility of marital advice and matchmaking agencies. The World Federation also sponsors, provides and distributes charity capital in the form of subsidiaries for education, health and housing projects, which are operational all over India and Africa, with the purpose of seeking to uplift the community. In particular, the *jama'at* in its activities formalises the relationship of the community to its new locality keeping links with Gujarat, Bombay and Africa via the Middle East alive through programmes of philanthropy and reform.

Despite a widening Twelver Khoja diaspora, traditional links with Iraq that contribute to the project of reform and modernity continue. For instance, an exiled Twelver Shi'i political leader, escaping persecution of the Ba'ath party leader Saddam Hussain, arrived in Bombay from Iraq in the early 1990s.[36] His charisma is said to have made him instantly popular with the Bombay Shi'as. He travelled from Bombay to Hyderabad and then to Gujarat, Delhi and Ladakh, addressing the Shi'i communities there. As a representative of Ayatullah Sayyid Abu'l Qasim al-Khoei, funds were channelled through him; in Bombay, he launched housing projects for the Shi'i migrant *zari* workers from the northern province of Uttar Pradesh, who were living in informal slums. Along with this, there were mass speeches and political rallies that are said to have had the persuasive effect of uniting different Shi'i communities: Khojas, non-Khojas, Irani, Hyderabadi, U.P., Kashmiri, Delhi and other South Indian Shi'as from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Some claim that this popularity led to his deportation on the grounds of being an illegal resident. On his departure, a trust called 'Najafi House' was founded in 1981 that continued the philanthropy projects and also published books on Shi'ism. The trust currently also brings out an English monthly journal known as *Jafferi Affairs* on current affairs in the Islamic world.

As described in this section, the breakaway Twelver Khoja community was built around migrating Iraqi Shi'i leaders and welfare trusts, as part of projects

35 Lachaier (Cambridge, 2007), p. 15.

36 I have deliberately maintained the anonymity of the leader at the request of my informants.

of religious and social reform. These institutions of Khoja modernity brought out community journals and accessible Islamic books, forging a print-based public sphere that linked local sites between Gujarat, Bombay and Africa via funds from the Middle East. This print-based public sphere circulates books written by authoritative Shi'i figures, replicating traditional structures with newer technological formats.

World islamic network

One such institution of Twlelver Khoja modernity is World Islamic Network (WIN) that deployed and forged a public sphere within these transnational linkages, through which community reform could be sought. The initiative, started by a group of fifteen Twelver Khoja businessmen in Bombay, was set up under the guidance of a Shi'i missionary from Bihar posted in East Africa, Maulana Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, as mentioned above, who was trained in Islamic studies in Najaf (Iraq).

WIN was registered as a charitable trust in 1991 as part of the print-based Twelver Khoja initiatives of reform. Its primary purpose was to respond to a dearth in accessible literature on Twelver Shi'ism in the English language, towards marketing the Twelver Shi'i faith. The initiative first began by printing pamphlets on Shi'ism and proceeded to publish books in the English language. The first book they published was entitled *Imamat* by Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, their mentor and Chief Missionary of Bilal Mission Muslim Trust in Africa. Subsequently, WIN has printed (and re-printed) more than 75 titles on Twelver Shi'ism, through which the group has sought to create a public in which such books can circulate. This was done by sending translated books in English to subscribers to the group free of cost. In return the subscribers were required to post a summary of the book. Much like a Habermasian public sphere based on membership, reading and discursive communication, a reading public was forged, in which books are read by people who do not physically meet or interact, but who are bound together for the moment of reading by its shared experience. However, this was not the Andersonian kind of public that imagines a community bound by territory and language that legitimates a shared belonging,[37] but one in which Islamic knowledge freely circulates outside the boundaries of the nation-state as well as a 'natural' 'religious' community.

The imagination of this reading public in which texts on Shi'ism circulate was a transnational one, in that it reached out to an international readership

[37] R. Pinto, *Between Empires: Print and Politics in Goa* (New Delhi, 2007).

outside traditional Shi'i pockets, including in Southeast Asia, South America, Japan and the United States of America (in one interview it was mentioned that their books were most in demand in USA jails). In seeking a circulation beyond the community's traditional geographical boundaries, this public creates a transnational religious market, where diverse opinions are available and multiple authoritative discourses are circulated in an intermediate sphere located between the personal and the public. In this context, personal preferences for particular Shi'i specialists or schools of thought and the sectarian undertones and religious controversies they represent are avoided, with the understanding that a religious market is about circulation and not an endeavour to convince others about faith. Also, affiliation to the Iraqi or Irani forms of authoritative traditions are not made public, maintaining that Sistani (Iraqi *marja'*) and Khamenei (Iranian *marja'*) are "like our two eyes, through which reading and understanding is mediated". In doing so, WIN's conception of reform is to create a religious market for information about faith as opposed to an ideology-based public. This can be seen in the manner in which the circulation of printed texts and the media channel steers clear of criticism of traditional practices and actively deploys ideas of religious pluralism, a positioning that can be located in the community's own mercantile past and diasporic vision. Further authority invested in the institution of the *marja'* as the centralising institution, is the channel through which funds from both Iran and Iraq are received by WIN, allowing for the maintenance of a religious market for Twelver Shi'ism in which a range of opinions are available for religious consumption. Further 'good packaging', readability and accessibility was emphasized, aimed at propagation, proliferation, and diversification as part of their ideas of reform. The group also dissociates from Wahhabi or puritanical forms of proselytising (*tabligh*) and instead emphasizes modern and liberal forms of Islam with the aim of diluting public images of terrorism commonly associated with Islam.

In addition to printing Islamic books in English, WIN subsequently also began a commercial 24-hour Islamic television channel in Bombay, on seeing the reach and effectiveness of television. Through this, it aimed to circulate modernist discourses on Islam that stresses rationality, accessibility of knowledge and practices of referencing theological argument with specific authority. While the channel carried an explicit theological content, its intention was not to critically evaluate other religions or faiths, but to use technology for disseminating ideas of a modernist Islam by expanding its viewership amongst non-Shi'i viewers. The WIN channel was initiated by circulating videotapes among local cable operators in Bombay who broadcast

their programmes daily for an hour or two. On seeing an emerging market for religious and cultural programmes based on Islam, an agreement to broadcast was drawn with local cable operators, such as Hathway, Seven Stars and WW One, for an annual carriage fee of 3 million Rupees. Through these agreements the earlier system of circulation of recorded videotapes was converted to a 24-hour channel, in which the main programme consisting of six to eight hours is broadcast on a repeat telecast in Bombay, Thane, New Bombay and Lucknow. These programmes can also be viewed live on its website.

The programmes on the channel include Quranic stories presented in a story-telling form, a programme on Muslim scientists, the history of Islamic ritual practices, a news bulletin on everyday truths, cooking shows, dubbed Iranian films on the life of Islamic prophets, such as Prophet Moses, as well as an Islamic quiz mimicking the Indian version of "Who wants to be a millionaire" (where a contestant is presented with a quiz question and wins the chance to earn higher amounts on successfully answering it). In the design, production and broadcasting of these programmes, secular formats are creatively deployed for religious purposes. Their recording, editing and post-production takes place in the WIN office on the Twelver Khoja Palla Galli in Dongri.

Importantly, despite the theological, social and ethical thrust of these programmes, the markets and audiences are not strictly defined through religious affiliations. In this regard, the importance of receiving letters from viewers belonging to different communities was underlined, and anecdotes that focus on the non-Muslim viewership were shared. Even programmes on theology or coverage of Muharram commemoration and sermons by leaders, which carry an explicit theological content, employ a format that highlights rational discourse. The lectures, for instance, are supported by references and employ an engaging conversational style as opposed to being emotionally charged, critical or challenging. WIN also runs a coaching centre that trains young Muslim boys and girls in fields of secular education, where it is felt that economic disadvantages diminishes chances of gaining access to better schools and colleges.

The infrastructure and initiative for reform employed by WIN, such as printing and circulating pamphlets, publishing and reprinting Islamic books, telecasting Islamic films made in Iran as well as running coaching centres for disadvantaged Muslims can be seen as ways of affecting social and religious reform and strengthening transnational connections. The modernity WIN deploys is distinct to its Khoja antecedents and the use of technology to

connect the diasporic Twelver Khoja community. For WIN seeks to create a subscriptional, print-based and electronic public sphere by not only deploying the format, discourse and architecture of a liberal public sphere but also seeks religious and secular knowledge as a means towards belonging in this religious liberal public sphere.[38] This Khoja modernity, while deriving from ideas of charismatic authority of the Shiʿi Imams who are remembered and looked to as exemplars, draws also from multiple sources of the Gujarati and Khoja past. In seeking to create a market for Twelver Shiʿism, it uses a conception of infrastructure and progress that is distinctly Khoja as it is Twelver Shiʿi and is modern in its use of a liberal mercantile vocabulary. In this regard, WIN as a Twelver Khoja initiative combines a community organisation based on philanthropy and community regulation, with mercantile attitudes that direct surplus capital towards community development and proliferation of the Shiʿi faith in liberal formats, by making information on Shiʿism available to a larger audience. Emerging from this distinct modernity, WIN seeks to create a public for Shiʿism outside the community boundaries, by enacting an indistinct separation between religion and politics, in order to create a transnational market for Twelver Shiʿism.

Tanzeem

In contrast with WIN and its use of technology, the Tanzeem group was started by Twelver Shiʿi clerics trained in the *hawza* (university for learning in Islamic sciences) in Qom (Iran), with a vision to reform the local Shiʿi

[38] This Khoja modernity can be understood against notions of Shiʿi modernity that Lara Deeb, for instance, has termed as pious modern. Being modern, as Deeb describes in the context of the Shiʿi community in Al-Dahiyya suburb in Beirut is explained by notions of authenticity, organisation, education, cleanliness, hygiene, social consciousness and piety, whereas not being modern is linked to tradition, ignorance and incomplete morality. Deeb describes a distinct Shiʿi modernity that inhabits multiple temporalities, in that it returns to the paradigm of the Imams, which in a liberal vocabulary is posited as 'return' or 'cyclicality' inhabited by a stagnant religious time. By putting forward the immanent idea of multiple temporalities in relation to liberal notions of progress and modernity, she argues that 'cyclicality' and linearity are constructs linked to other binary oppositions, such as modern/not-modern, secular–religious, and national–mythic, occluding much more complex relationships and possibilities that fall between these poles. The idea of a pious modern then, she argues, is a combination of modern, progressive and religious values as the coexistence of multiple 'mythic' and 'historical' pasts rather than as the structure or experience of time itself. See L. Deeb, "Emulating and/or embodying the ideal: The gendering of temporal frameworks and Islamic role models in Shi'i Lebanon", *American Ethnologist*, 36, 2 (2009), pp. 242–257.

community. This vision is modelled on images (in print and electronic form) of religious and political developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran, post the 1979 revolution that acts as a cultural *milieu* that Tanzeem uses to model themselves and to rethink the local religious and material context.

Tanzeem, a registered youth welfare organisation comprising 25–30 young professionals in Hyderabad, adopts a similar style of functioning as WIN. It circulates pamphlets on Twelver Shiʿism, focusing particularly on Shiʿi politics in the Middle East, seeking to not only contribute to accessible literature on Twelver Shiʿism but also circulates opinions on contemporary Muslim politics, such as opposition in Palestine and Lebanon to Israeli state practices and in particular, the role of the revolution in contemporary Iran. Like WIN, Tanzeem also runs a coaching centre, where members 'career-counsel' and coach Shiʿi students from economically disadvantaged contexts, particularly from Hyderabad's old city where a substantial population of the Shiʿi urban poor live. In addition, Tanzeem organises forums for public discussion and debate, including an Islamic quiz through mobile phones, which entails a prize for the first right SMS. Tanzeem's engagement with the media was not merely a self-conscious practice of mediation and marketisation, as in the case of WIN; the engagement with media technology here is premised on the idea of mobilising and seeking political and social change (the Urdu word *tanzeem* also translates as 'to bring about change'), where political agency is sought by re-engaging with Islamic traditions within an 'activist imaginary'.[39]

I discovered the impetus of reform locally using Islamic media during the commemoration of Muharram in 2008 in Hyderabad, when Tanzeem had for the first time put up a stall in Daru Shifa, Hyderabad's old city. Unlike other stalls that customarily served water, embellished urban space with Islamic iconography and played cassette sermons and Muharram songs on their loudspeakers that reintroduce rhythmic laments every year into the old cityscape, Tanzeem's stall mediated tradition through newer objects, such as CDs, DVDs, books films and T-shirts with a message 'Muharram against terrorism'. They also sold DVDs and CDs of Islamic films, similar to the dubbed Iranian films on the lives of Muslim Prophets telecast by WIN. In addition, they circulated filmic autobiographies that narrate the moral and political lives of Shiʿi leaders, such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Mustafa Chamran (the Iranian-born Islamist activist who worked in the Lebanese context to organise a military movement in 1974). Apart from this, sermons by Shiʿi preachers from Pakistan, who are trained in Iran, were distributed on CDs and DVDs, with a thematic anti-imperial emphasis.

[39] See G. E. Marcus, *Connected: Engagements with Media* (Chicago, 1996).

Through sustained interaction with the activists in subsequent Muharram seasons, I learnt that Tanzeem began as an Islamic self-study circle, which they refer to as QSC (Quranic Study Circle), who met after university and working hours, with an endeavour to engage with Islamic texts. Every meeting at QSC entailed assigning a verse from the Quran to a student, who researched and presented it. The group recited the verse in Arabic and its translation in English, followed by a ten-minute break in which tea and snacks were shared. After the break, an assigned person made his presentation on the specific verse (the group was composed of mostly men) which was discussed by the entire group.

This model of self-engagement with the holy texts, in terms of recitation of the verse, its interpretation and its appreciation in the context of its revelation, is the basis for this reformist imagination. The imagination is derived from a larger Islamic reformist ethos of self-study, which involves an engagement with Islam to establish the true and correct understanding of traditional beliefs and practices, that Eickelman and Piscatori have termed 'objectification', and which Deeb has also called the process of seeking 'authentification' in Islamic ritual practices. Tanzeem, therefore, publicly circulate images of a global Shiʿi imaginary that broadly espouses a shift from *praxis* (practice) or *orthopraxy* towards *logos* (reason) or *orthodoxy*, by calling into being a reflexive consciousness in engaging with questions like 'What is my religion', 'Why is it important to my life', and 'How do my beliefs guide my conduct'.[40] QSC forums were hence a platform to engage with religion through personal reflexivity under supervision of those formally trained. Tanzeem thus works within such an imaginary that seeks an underlying reason and purpose (*maqsad*) for the performance of Islamic rituals. The performance of rituals are a means towards an end that is politically aware, emancipatory and ethically-rooted in authentic meanings of Karbala as a paradigm for self-reflexivity and political awareness; as also displayed according to them, in the events leading up to the Iranian revolution in 1979.

As a reformist initiative, Tanzeem uses technology to critique the continued association of Twelver Shiʿism with a culture of patronage. This is a local culture of patronage of public state sponsored Shiʿism that began with the Indo-Iranian Qutub Shahi dynasty, continued by the Sunni Asif Jahis (notwithstanding a brief interval during Aurangazeb's rule) and is presently overseen by the community elites. The materially 'backward' condition of the Shiʿi urban poor is seen as a result of moral retrogression and an embedding

[40] Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education", p. 643.

in this cultural model of patronage. Traditional commemorative acts of seeking intercession from the martyrs of Karbala are notionally equated with a local Muslim feudal culture embodied particularly in Hyderabad's old city.

Their critique of patronage and feudalism also extends to Twelver Khoja welfare trusts, mostly funded by the World Federation, such as Imam-i-Zamana Mission that has been operating in Hyderabad city since 1984. Unlike, the Twelver Khoja modes of intervention, Tanzeem seek to adopt a model of intervention that they believe will strengthen the community from within, both in matters of faith (*deen*) and secular education (*duniya*). Tanzeem circulates images and texts that emphasize a politically-engaged association with Islam as opposed to a model of philanthropy, which, they argue, perpetuates a feudal culture of patronage through the dominance of traditional ritualism, the local elites and welfare trusts. Furthermore, the authority of local *'ulama*, perceived as playing to popular religious sentiments for personal profit, is also sought to be undermined. In seeking to effect change from patronage to a service-oriented and self-reliance as a collective strategy of modernisation and survival, media technology is deployed to effect the movement towards self-reliance.

In the numerous pamphlets published by Tanzeem and the posters displayed in their stall, the most repeated textual references and quotes were from the Iranian spiritual head Ayatollah Khamenei, referred to as the '*Rahbar-i-Muslimeen*' (Farsi, 'leader of Muslims'), Iraqi *marja'* Ayatollah Sistani, referred to as the '*Marja'-i-Taqleed*' (Farsi, 'source of authority to follow'), and the Lebanese Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, referred to as the '*Sayyid-ul Maqawamat'* (Farsi, 'guide to the spiritual station'). This suggests an attempt to harmonise moral authority from sources that are otherwise multifarious. The videos of live recordings of sermons copied and sold also include reputed politically-active Pakistani *'ulama* trained in Iran, on topics such as 'anti-Bush' or 'anti-imperialism' within further attempts to forge global Shi'i imaginaries and a collective Shi'i identity.

Above all, the exemplars on which Tanzeem models itself came from filmic autobiographies on Shi'i revolutionaries who played a significant role in transnational Shi'i politics. For instance, the documentary film *Fateh Mubeen* was screened in the stall for the passing-by Muharram commemorator in Hyderabad's old city, on the political context of the emergence of the Hezbollah and its role in the 2006 attack of Israel on Lebanon. The film describes the popularity of the Hezbollah party in Lebanon. It narrates the emergence of the Hezbollah as the first organised Shi'i Arab resistance that successfully gained victory over Israel, and depicts Nasrulla's popularity not

just in Lebanon but also in Pakistan in 'voicing the concerns of the Muslim heart'.[41] The narrative thus fashions a trans-national Shi'i identity, weaving diverse struggles like Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq into a continuous fight against injustice as in the idea of the battle of Karbala, obliterating borders of nation-states and reconfiguring varied national events around a singular memory.[42] What is interesting about the films screened and sold by Tanzeem are the multiple sources from which they are constructed. These films are copied and assembled from various films produced from Iran, Lebanon and Pakistan. *Fateh Mubeen*, for instance, is a random assembly of images and video footage from *Al-Manar* (the satellite television station launched by the Hezbollah in 1991 with the help of Iranian funds), clips from programmes produced by Iranian state television as well as from Pakistani news channels such as Payam, AirOne, PP, Sahar TV and GEO Television. The montage of video clips from Iran, Pakistan, Palestine and Lebanon in a single filmic narrative was most striking in a specific short video clip, which was screened in the Tanzeem stall in Hyderabad's old city during the first ten days of Muharram. The video, shot like an MTV song, showed quick images of Ayathollah Khamenei and Hasan Nasrullah addressing large gatherings, shots of Imam Hussain's shrine in Karbala, as well as popular Muharram posters of Imam Hussain's wounded horse (Zuljana) returning from the battlefield to images of mourning by women of the Prophet's family. These images were interspersed with war clippings of wounded soldiers, and mourning women in Palestine and Lebanon. The three-minute video constantly featured the Palestinian flag with a background song "We will take revenge for every crime committed on Muslims since Karbala". It seamlessly moved between

---

[41] The emphasis of a singular form of memory as a political practice within the transnational Shi'i network is not to stress Islamic media forms as propaganda but instead to point towards a uni-linear dimension of representation of otherwise complex national and trans-national power relations and discourses. As Jeremy Stolow cautions against an instrumental perception of media as technology employed to further religious message as "tricks of mystification" that reinforce previously specious assumptions about the "putative distinct realms of religion and media". For more on this, see J. Stolow, "Religion and/as Media", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22, 4 (2005), pp. 119–145.

[42] This importance of memory as a category of political practice in the analysis of a transnational Shi'i network has been explored by Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, who argues that contestations of memory order the power dynamics between various national actors within the network. And as Shaery-Eisenlohr shows these national and contextual differences between Iran and Lebanon are glossed over or de-emphasised, in accounts like the celebration of Mustafa Chamran as a founder of the Hezbollah. See R. Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Postrevolutionary Iran and Shi'i Lebanon: Contested histories of Shi'i transnationalism", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 39, 2 (2007), pp. 271–289, for more on this.

the struggle for Palestine, the shrine in Karbala and the streets of Beirut to link various political struggles through a theme of injustice, rebellion and Karbala, through songs and verse.

As activists, Tanzeem emphasizes that what is needed in Hyderabad is not a Hezbollah but rather a collective change in the local Twelver Shi‘i community, a change from historically-embedded traditional structures of patronage, feudalism and moral decadence, which they perceive to have resulted in the contemporary disadvantages of Muslims as a minority within the Indian nation-state. Through self-study of Islam, Tanzeem activists posit themselves as religious and politically conscious subjects, and critique a postcolonial history that they believe has shaped contemporary ritual practices of Islam by relegating Islam to the private sphere. They seek change in the local Shi‘i community in Hyderabad by re-introducing discourses that fuse traditional ritual with political meanings, as ways of articulating a vision of insurrection that returns a political imagination to Shi‘ism. Tanzeem believes that self-study and a re-engagement with Islam can effect this change. Through the use of technology, Tanzeem activists appear to borrow a modern Shi‘i imaginary, by re-thinking the local in terms of Shi‘i transnational networks; one which relates their ritual practice to political struggles in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine, as part of the Karbala paradigm to seek justice and ‘progress’.

It is, hence, worthwhile to reflect on the conceptions of reform, and universal aspirations that they entail, in the cases of both WIN and Tanzeem. For the latter, universalism is derived from a re-reading of Karbala in a post-1979 Islamic Iranian *milieu*, through a tradition of circulation linked closely with Iran and its religious politics. And for WIN, the potential to earn, educate, inform and broadcast the message of Karbala, effectuated through a separation of personal beliefs and sectarian inclinations associated with it, is a movement towards universalisation. Thus, the idea of movement and market informs notions of progress that are tied to wider transnational circulation. These contrasting conceptions of reform by two Twelver Shi‘i initiatives are embedded in their separate circulatory traditions and structures of authority.

Conclusion

Much of the writing on the use of media and print technology for Islamic reform lays stress on the creation of new audiences and new democratic forms of religious expression as a shift from ecclesiastic, ritual and dynastic authority. In describing two conceptions of reform and their deployment of technology towards different ends, this article has sought to complicate such

reading. It has highlighted the development of transnational links of reformist Islam as replicating the traditional, social and material contexts from which they emerge, by making technological connections and articulating universal claims.

WIN, as a Twelver Khoja reform initiative, derives from the diasporic experience of members of this community. What connects them in Bombay, Gujarat, port cities in East Africa and later the West, is a print-based public sphere, in the form of community Gujarati journals and Islamic books, whose publication and distribution is overseen and funded by local welfare trusts through charity capital that is routed via structures of authority in Iraq and Iran. As a diasporic community, the Twelver Khojas employ a distinct modernity through community organisations like *jamaʿat* and welfare trusts that uphold social and religious reform. The members of these community organisations bringing out community journals and publishing Islamic books in local languages could be likened to Benedict Anderson's 'creole journeymen'[43] or Jon Anderson's 'technological adepts' who are not necessarily religious experts but migrants who connect with their homeland through Islam and the Internet, interrogating Westphalian notions of national interest, opinion and language, central to classical notions of the public sphere.[44] As part of the Twelver Khoja diaspora, they could also be seen as belonging to what Jon Anderson calls an "internal diaspora", consisting of transnational professionals who combine technological skills with access to Islamic books and texts, and are responsible for bringing Islam into the medium of technology.[45]

WIN, as a reform initiative based in Bombay, is part of a traditional transnationalism enabled, in this case, by diasporic and patronage ties across the Indian Ocean through Islam. As described here, it emerges from this diasporic interconnectedness, including the publication and circulation of Islamic books and community journals amongst a subscribing and readership based public. However, its reformist and universal conception lies in seeking to exceed the traditional contours of the religious print market, in order to circulate Islamic discourses amongst non-Muslims. Employing a transnational imagination, it extends the contours of membership of this

[43] B. Anderson, *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991 [1983]).

[44] N. Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24, 4 (2007), pp. 7–30.

[45] J. W. Anderson, "New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam", *Social Research*, 70, 3 (2003), pp. 887–906.

public outside the margins of the diasporic Twelver Khoja community and the Twelver community, reaching out to non-Muslims in far-away lands. This imagination desists from being involved in political controversies, and works like a religious market or an intermediate sphere between personal and public that is essentially decentralised, networked and permissive. And yet, as Charles Hirsckind reminds us, the decentralised nature of the religious market created by the technological adepts or 'creole journeymen' does not exclude institutional and disciplinary conditions that enable it.[46] Instead, its dissemination is in accordance with structures of traditional religious authority replicated in the transnational public sphere that culturally draws from Islamic and Twelver Shi'i authority. This can be seen in the ways in which texts by Shi'i authoritative figures and local charismatic leaders such as Mullah Qadir, Haji Naji and Maulana Rizvi are published and distributed, discursively shaping the religious market.

WIN, with its location in the context of the post-liberalising city of Bombay, now re-named as Mumbai, is embedded within a distinct Twelver Khoja modernity and belongs to a tradition of circulation that combines movement related to trade with religion. Its production of a religious market, then, is an effort to propagate Islam publicly while seeking to separate religion from politics in creating a transnational appeal for Twelver Shi'ism. In contrast is Tanzeem's effort in using technology to bring politics back to Shi'ism in the context of Hyderabad, by forging a transnational imagination modelled on Shi'i politics in Iran through which the local is sought to be reformed. While both Twelver reform initiatives use coaching centres as a path towards progress and modernity, Tanzeem avowedly seeks to alter and change local forms of Shi'i practices in its acts of intervention towards what it sees as moral, political and material progress. It enacts a modernity in seeking to break away from traditional local forms of commemoration and models of patronage towards universalist conceptions that derives from

[46] Charles Hirschkind employs Michael Warner's notion of counterpublics or the idea of a subaltern publics of subordinated status groups, such as queer or religious publics that are excluded from dominant norms but mobilise their own collectivities in which participation is one of the ways in which member's identities are formed and transformed. However, Hirschkind departs from Warner in stressing the disciplinary and authoritative structures and traditions that undergird this notion of a religious counterpublics, further emphasising the formation of political opinion not through inter-subjective reason but through the deployment of the disciplining power of ethical speech, resulting not in policy but in pious dispositions, embodied sensibilities and modes of expression understood to facilitate Islamic virtues and Islamic ethical comportment. See C. Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics* (New York, 2006).

transnational Shi'i politics. WIN's modernity derives from the creation of a transnational market and literate public sphere for the circulation of Islamic discourse, while it also works in providing secular education that enables the community to partake and belong to this transnational public.

Tanzeem deploys modes of a liberal secular public sphere, including adopting popular formats, such as the 'MTV video', similar to WIN. However, unlike WIN in its attempt to belong to a secular liberal public, Tanzeem seeks to interrogate secular liberal assumptions. This is done by aiming to re-establish the relationship between Islam and politics, questioning what it sees as the historical effects of colonialism on Islamic tradition in terms of its limitation to the private sphere. It seeks to do this by imprinting discourses of the Iranian revolution and by offering what could be seen as a revivalist reading of Karbala that critiques traditional ritual practices by arguing for a universalist model premised on a revolutionary imagination. Much of this reformist imaginary, emphasized by the circulation of Islamic texts and films, is used to rethink the local context where Shi'ism was once a dominant public and courtly culture with links to Iran.

This is probably one of the reasons that Tanzeem's reformist initiatives are highly contested by the local Shi'i community. Every Muharram, the stall put up by the Tanzeem activists is repeatedly attacked by different groups - including not just the local Akhbari group but also the Usuli group - for its critique of local Shi'i practices. In particular, the resistance to their initiative centres on their advocacy of Khamenei's controversial *fatwa* against self-flagellation using sharp instruments as a mode of commemorating Muharram. Met with active resistance, this only bolsters Tanzeem's belief that the path towards reform and the realisation of an authentic Shi'i self will be resisted, given what the Tanzeem activists believe is a moral decadence that ails local society.

WIN's reformist efforts, on the other hand, including their print and electronic media programmes, are widely popular, within the context of a separation between religion and politics in which controversies are avoided and personal opinions undisclosed. During Muharram, for instance, all live commemorations telecast on its channel are publicly screened in Muslim neighbourhoods and slums in Bombay and collectively watched, allowing for a market-wide circulation that engenders different modes of commemoration and personal affiliations. Diverse reformist agendas therefore appear to be underlined by disparate circulatory routes that are re-emphasized by media trajectories, as can be seen in the case of both WIN and Tanzeem, pointing to

the social and material base through which Islamic transnational networks are forged and moral universalism sought to be articulated. This signals a situated universalism, in which transcendental ethics like those embodied in notions of an Islamic modernism, is democratically disseminated through print and electronic media within the separate public spheres. Both conceptions of reform then are locally embedded and grounded in their respective material cultures that are constituted through community and technological trajectories, commonly seeking an ethical universalism as much as global transnational connections across places through Islam.

7 Shari‘a, Shi‘as and Chishtiya Revivalism
Contextualising the Growth of Sectarianism in the Tradition of the Sialvi Saints of Punjab

Tahir Kamran and Amir Khan Shahid

The significance of Sufism in various manifestations of Islamic cultures has been seminal, as a prime agency mediating between man and God and also, with particular reference to Muslim South Asia, "in mediating between man and society".[1] Equally important is the role of the Sufis as agents in processes of cultural hybridisation and syncretism. South Asia and particularly the Punjab, the region that forms the site of this article's exploration, have been inhabited by culturally, religiously and ethnically divergent communities, across which different Sufi traditions have historically provided a 'gluing' force. The Chishtiya Sufi *silsilah*, inaugurated in India, is particularly important in embodying an Indic pluralism while at the same time bringing "Islam to the masses and the masses towards Islam".[2]

This article sets out to explore the development of an exclusionary streak in the Chishtiya order after its revival in late-eighteenth century Punjab, with Nur Muhammad Muharvi (1730–1790) as its harbinger. It highlights the process whereby Chishti Sufis from this period onwards embarked on the path of excluding Shi‘as from what they regarded as the central Islamic tradition. This sectarian gulf widened further with the parallel emergence of the Usuli faction among the Shi‘a, who laid stress on the exclusivity of their community. Shi‘i deprecation of the first three Sunni Caliphs (*tabarra*) institutionalised this Shi‘a-Sunni alienation, which eventually snowballed into a 'powder-keg' situation by the last two decades of the twentieth century. While usually perceived as an 'inclusive' Sufi order, the process of religious

1 Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2000), p. 234.

2 S. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi, 1975), i, p. 115; M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967), p. 116.

reform impelled Chishti *pir*s to shun plurality, supposedly the central trait of their order, and instead embrace a more sectarian ethos, a trend that this article explores in relation to the *sajjada nashin*s[3] of Sial Sharif. It is also argued here that the emphasis placed by protagonists of the Chishtiya revival on the *shari'a* (Islamic law) for the revitalisation of Muslim society acted as a conduit for the emergence of these sectarian tendencies.

The evolution of the Chishtiya *silsilah* in the Indian subcontinent

The Chishtiya *silsilah* was initiated in India by Mu'in-ud-din Chishti in the twelfth century CE, but its resonance reached the Punjab courtesy Farid-ud-din Ganj Shakar, who established his *dargah* at Ajodhan (present-day Pakpattan in Pakistan). The bulk of its doctrine was developed in the subcontinent where it absorbed the cultural ethos, and it was recognised as arguably the most inclusive of all the local Sufi orders. Chishti Sufis adopted practices such as *zikr* (recollection of God) and *sama'* (devotional music) as the spiritual signature of their *silsilah*, which also helped it in terms of assimilating with indigenous culture.

According to Ernst, Chishtiya Sufism can be defined as

> both an experience and memory. It is the experience of remembering God so intensely that the soul is destroyed and resurrected. It is also the memory of those who remembered God, those who were devoted to discipline and prayer, but above all, to remembrance, whether they recited the divine name (*zikr*) or evoked his presence through song (*sama*). While the Chishti experience of remembering God is possible, it has rarely been attained, only a few have been able to focus their whole being on God, remembering his name and evoking his presence in pursuit of the path of love, the Sufi ideal. These were the great ones, in Sufi idiom, the saints, the Shaikhs, the pirs, the masters and captains of spiritual destiny who drew countless others to God through their exemplary lives and pure passion.[4]

The Chishtiya *silsilah* as an institution traces its spiritual genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad through a chain of such eminent personalities such as

---

3 The literal meaning of *sajjada nashin* is the one who sits on the prayer carpet. Generally it denotes the hereditary heir of a *pir* who *ipso facto* assumes the role of a denomination's spiritual head. David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London, 1988), p. 42.

4 Carl W. Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York, 2003), p. 2.

'Ali (Prophet's cousin and son-in-law) and Sufis including Hasan al-Basri (d.728), Ibrahim ibn Adham (d.779), and Fuzayl ibn Iyaz (d.802/3).[5] It is important to note here that 'Ali was the spiritual forbear for the Chishtis and the first Imam for the Shi'a too. His sacralised figure was instrumental in encouraging a ready acceptance of Shi'i cultural norms among the Chishtis. Similarly the *ahl-i bait*, the progeny of 'Ali and Fatima (the Prophet's daughter), were held in very high esteem by Chishti Sufis in general. Rizvi thus discerns a remarkable sense of mutuality between the Sufis and Shi'as. In his words, "the Sufi concept of the position of the Shaikh came to be increasingly parallel to the Shi'i Imamate, while 'Ali came to occupy almost as important a position in Sufism as he did in Shi'ism".[6]

Thus, what caused these "shared synergies"[7] to peter out represents the core theme of this article. To contextualise the events separating these two groups, we need first to look at the evolution of the Chishtiya *silsilah* and its emergence in India. This Sufi order stemmed from Shaikh Abu 'Ishaq Shami who came to reside in Chisht.[8] Hence, it was from there that the Chishtiya *silsilah* originated. The core ideology of the Chishtiya *silsilah* is predicated on the theory of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being). Its initial formulation is attributed to Muhiy-ud-din Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240),[9] who, according to Rizvi, "managed to reconcile varying Sufi views on Reality and re-orientated them in such a way as to form a sound basis for future developments in ideas on mysticism".[10] The Chishtiya *silsilah*'s popular appeal, and massive following, was linked to processes of 'Indianisation', whereby Sufis incorporated certain Hindu practices while remaining loyal to the fundamental tenets of Islam. Hence, one tends to concur with Moin Nizami in considering the Sufi dispensation to be far from an "inflexible

5 Tanvir Anjum, *Chishti Sufis in the Sultanate of Delhi: 1190–1400* (Karachi, 2011), p. 7.

6 S.N.R. Rizvi, "Shi'ism and Sufism: Polemics and Identity Formation under the Nawabs of Awadh", in *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Society and Politics in India*, (eds.) Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi, 2006), p. 382.

7 Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 5.

8 Khawja Abu 'Ishaq Shami originally belonged to Syria but moved to Chisht near Herat in Khurasan province at the behest of his spiritual guide Khwaja Alu of Dinawar. On the advice of his spiritual guide, 'Ishaq Shami adopted the soubriquet 'Chishti' Anjum, *Chishti Sufis in the Sultanate of Delhi*, pp. 93–94.

9 For Shaikh-al Akbar's life and thoughts, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn-al Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989).

10 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, i, p. 103.

or ossified relic of the traditional past".[11] Nizam-ud-din Aurangabadi, the famous Chishti Sufi, while referring to various *zikr* formulas, advocated placing yogic techniques like breath control within an Islamic framework, which to him was "perfectly valid for non-Arabs in particular".[12] In this way, they "shaped local mystical traditions".[13]

As mentioned above, the Chishtiya *silsilah* was initiated in India by Mu'in-ud-din Chishti Ajmeri. After him, Khawja Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganj-i Shakar, Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya and Shaikh Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Chiragh-i Delhi oversaw the affairs of Chishtiya *silsilah* during their respective epochs. The *silsilah* attained its zenith in fourteenth-century Delhi with the rise to prominence of Nizam-ud-din Auliya.[14] In the Punjab, however, Chishtiya teachings acquired the momentum of an organised spiritual movement through the strivings and *karamat* (gifted spiritual powers) of Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganj-i Shakar (1175–1265). The force of his charisma and pre-eminence as a Chishti Sufi elevated the Punjab and particularly Pakpattan to the *silsilah*'s epicentre, and his headquarters became somewhere where people from all corners of India converged to seek blessings and *baraka'*.[15] Farid's charismatic sway rested tangibly upon succeeding Chishti saints, specifically those of the south-eastern Punjab such as the Sialvi *khanwada* (family of *pir*s). Among other things, Farid's influence is also demonstrated in the architectural pattern of the Sialvi mausoleum, which is the exact replica of his own tomb.

With Farid's demise in 1265, the Chishtiya *silsilah* re-centred itself on Delhi with Nizam-ud-din Auliya as its principal protagonist. The ascendancy of Auliya as the central Chishti figure was synchronised with the split of the *silsilah* into Nizami and Sabri branches. Shaikh-ud-din 'Ali Sabri (d.1291) of Kalyer (a small town near Roorkee) was the founder of the Sabri branch.[16] However, Chishti-Sabri influence was confined only to Awadh and its

---

[11] Moin Nizami, 'Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam: The Chishti-Sabris in 18th to 19th Century North India', unpublished PhD Thesis, 2010, University of Cambridge, p. i.

[12] It is noteworthy that he cites *zikr* formulas in Punjabi and Hindi, such as the following, attributed to Farid-ud-din: "Say *wuhi hi* upwards, *hi hi* to the left side of the breast, *hin hi* toward the heart". See Nizām al-Din Awrangābāadī, *Nizām-al-qulūb* (Delhi, 1309/1891–2), p. 30, cited in *ibid*., pp. 32–34.

[13] Raziuddin Aquil, "Music and Related Practices in Chishti Sufism: Celebrations and Contestations", *Social Scientist* 40, (March-April 2012), p. 19.

[14] For Nizam-ud-din Auliya's life sketch, see Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, i, pp. 154–163.

[15] Richard Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid", in *India's Islamic Traditions:711–1750*, (ed.) Richard Eaton (Delhi, 2003), p. 264.

[16] Moin Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam.* p. 57.

surrounding areas. Thus its relevance with respect to Punjab remained just marginal. Now while reverting to the Chishti influence in the Punjab after Farid, Sanyal maintains, Chishtiya influence suffered an apparent decline until the eighteenth century.[17] Throughout these centuries, the Punjab witnessed the waxing influence of the Qadiriya and Suharwardiya orders.

This article now addresses how the Chishtiya *silsilah* staged a comeback in this region in an era of political turmoil. The decline of the Mughal empire, the emergence of the Sikh kingdom and then the arrival of the British from the late eighteenth century onwards significantly influenced local Chishti Sufis in the Punjab, who began to emphasise the strict following of the *shari'a* and the re-establishment of Muslim political rule, either through reviving religious practices among Muslims and/or through *jihad*. This response was not peculiar to Punjabi Chishti Sufis. In fact, different Sufi *silsilah*s in Africa, China, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe and South East Asia all adopted a similar strategy to counter internal threats and threats from colonial powers.[18] In the Punjab, in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, notes Nizami in *Tarikh-i masha'ikh-i Chisht*, Hafiz Jamal (d. 1811), a disciple of Muharwi, along with his followers joined Nawab Muzaffar Khan's army to fight the Sikhs in order to retain Muslim rule in the Multan region.[19] Similarly in 1835, a Sufi, Mian Muhammad Afzal, revolted against the Sikhs in Jhang District and was killed.[20] Willis observes the same trend in nineteenth-century West Africa where *jihad* in the name of Allah and the supremacy of the *shari'a* became the central focus of religious reformers.[21]

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South Asia, Sufi involvement in politics and war, and in influencing social and cultural practices based on the *shari'a*, significantly re-defined relations among different Muslim communities. One such relationship was between the subcontinent's Sunni and Shi'i communities. Chishti Sufis, who followed the Sunni version of Islam, thus began to exclude Shi'as from mainstream Islamic traditions from

---

17 Usha Sanyal, *Devotional Islam and Politics in British India: Ahmad Riza Khan Barewli and his Movement,1870–1920* (Delhi, 1996).

18 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago, 1979 [1966]), pp. 205–211; Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley, 1997).

19 Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Masha'īkh-i Chisht*, (Karachi, 2007), v, pp. 278–280.

20 Muhammad Suhbat Khan Kohati, *Faroog-i 'ilm main Khānwāda-i Sīyāl Sharīf aur un kē Khulfa kā Kirdār* (Karachi, 2010), pp. 60–61.

21 John Ralph Willis, "Jihad fi Sabil Allah: Its Doctrinal Basis in Islam and Some Aspects of Its Evolution in Nineteenth-Century West Africa", *The Journal of African History* 8, 3 (1967), pp. 395–415.

the late eighteenth century onwards. Even Shi'i *'ulama* were not willing to reconcile with Sunnis and publically competed with the latter. Accordingly, the Chishtiya revivalist movement in the Punjab helped to create a gulf between various Muslim communities. More importantly, the difference between these two sects concerning their respective attitudes towards the first three Caliphs became the most contentious issue (see below). A number of scholarly studies and hagiographic literature gives credit to Nur Muhammad Muharvi (1730–1790) and his followers for initiating this Chishtiya revivalism.[22] Muharvi's followers included the *sajjada nashin*s of Sial Sharif, a small town in district Shahpur (later renamed Sargodha). Taking them as a case study, this article will now explore how the wider Chishtiya revivalism strained the relationship between Sunnis and Shi'i schools of thought/ communities in this part of the Punjab.

The shrine at Sial Sharif was the most revered shrine in the Shahpur/ Sargodha district.[23] Its *sajjada nashin*s in the late-colonial era tilted towards Deobandi political ideology,[24] with firstly condemnation of the heterodox Ahmadis and subsequently 'damnation' of Shi'as. The shrine's geography, which saw it surrounded by Shi'i Sufi shrines (e.g. Shah Jiwana in Jhang District, and Rajoa Sa'adat in Jhang/ Chiniot districts), all of which wielded considerable spiritual and political influence, played an important role in its *sajjada nashins*' increasing espousal of Deobandi views. Late-colonial era sectarianism was then reinforced in the decades following independence, with the result that in contemporary Pakistan Sial Sharif has drawn close to the extremist Sunni sectarian organisation, the Sipah-i Sahabah-i Pakistan.[25]

---

22 With Sulaman Taunsawi, Khawja Muhammad 'Aqil of Kot Mithan and Hafiz Muhammad Jamal of Multan, Chishti *pir*s came to epitomise the Islamic revivalist streak, which seemed to have lent an exclusionary character to Taunsawi and his successors despite their Chishtiya denomination. The *pir*s of Golra Sharif and Sial Sharif were disciples of Taunswi.

23 James Wilson, *Shahpur District Gazetteer* (Lahore, Government of the Punjab Printing, 1897), p. 87.

24 Khwaja Zia-ud-din was an ardent supporter of the Khilafat movement. Hence he had extremely cordial relations with Deobandi *'ulama*, as was evident from the welcome accorded to him by several *'ulama* including Anwar Shah Kashmiri on his visit to Deoband in 1927. See Murid Ahmad Chishti, *Fauz-ul-Miqāl fī Khulfa-i Pīr-i Sīyāl*, (Jhelum, n.d), iii, p. 245.

25 Sipah-i-Sahabah-i Pakistan came into existence in September 1985 in District Jhang. Local cleric Haq Nawaz Jhangvi was its first leader. Campaigning against Shi'ism was the central postulate of the SSP. For a detailed account of the SSP, see Vali Reza Nasr, "The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics", *Modern Asian Studies*, 34, 1, (Feb., 2000), pp. 139–180; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Sectarianism in Pakistan: the Radicalization of Shi'i and Sunni Identities", *Modern Asian Studies*, 32, 3, (Jul., 1998), pp. 689–716.

Neo-Sufism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

The diminishing flame of Chishtiya mysticism was rekindled by a number of so-called neo-Sufis denoting new tendencies within the Sufi traditions, among them Fakhir-ud-din Dehlavi (1717–1785) and Shah Kalim Allah (1650–1729).[26] The impulse for Chishtiya resurgence, as Gilmartin contends, originated in Delhi where the decline of the Mughals was felt most intensely and it had explicit reflection on the works and thought of these two Chishti Sufis.[27] Its revival came about in the Punjab through Noor Muhammad Muharvi (1730–91), who established a *khanaqah* at the small town of Muhar near Bahawalpur in the mid-eighteenth century. The Chishtiya revitalisation subsequently reached its culmination in Taunsa, Golra and Sial Sharif.[28] As a result of Muharvi's influence, Sangharh, Ahmadpur, Chachran, Makhad, Jalalpur, Bahawalpur, Multan, Pakpatten, Dera Ghazi Khan, Hajipur, Rajanpur, Narwala, Muhammadpur, Ferozepur, Kot Mithan and Sultanpur (towns and cities located in South Punjab and Sindh) emerged as the prominent Chishti centres.[29] Zameer-ud-din Siddique considers Muharvi as an originator of the Nizamiya branch of the Chishtiya order in the Punjab and Sindh, who also fostered its growth to the extent that it eclipsed other "mystic fraternities" such as the Qadiriya and Suhrawardiya orders that had had overriding influence in the Punjab until the eighteenth century.[30]

---

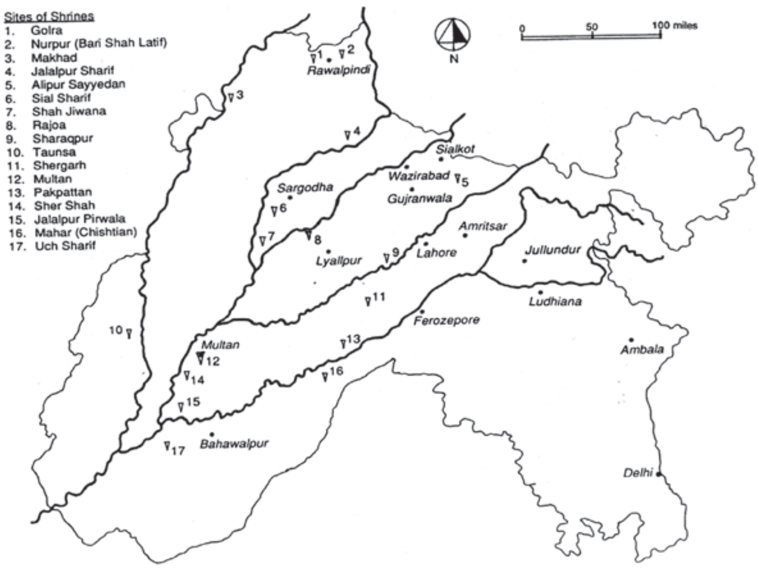
[26] Fakhir-ud-din Dehlavi was born at Aurangabad. He was a *khalifa* of Shah Kalim Ullah Shahjahanabadi (1650–1729), a much acclaimed protagonist of Chishtiya revivalism. For his biographical account, see S. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Waliullah and his Times* (Canberra, 1980), p. 376; Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Mashā'ikh-i Chisht*, pp. 451–496; Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, p. 109.

[27] David Gilmartin, "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab", *Modern Asian Studies* 13, 3 (1979), p. 488.

[28] Khwaja Noor Muhammad was the prominent *khalifa* of Fakhir-ud-din Dehlavi. He received his early instruction at Lahore and then proceeded to Delhi for higher esoteric learning from Fakhir-ud-din. Later on, at the persuasion of his teacher (*murshid*) he came to Muhar (Bahawalpur) and settled there. Muhar in due course became the centre of Chishtiya activity. For further details, see Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Mashā'ikh-i Chisht* (Lahore, 2007), v, pp. 210–234, and Qazi Javaid, *Punjāb kē Sūfī Dānīshwār* (Lahore, 2005), pp. 201–219.

[29] Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Mashā'ikh-i Chisht*, v, p. 211.

[30] M. Zammer ud din Siddique, "The Resurgence of the Chishti Silsilah in the Punjab during the Eighteenth Century", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 1970* (New Delhi, 1971), i, p. 408. Also see Liyaqat Hussain Moini, "Devotional Linkages of Punjab with the Chishti Shrine at Ajmer: Gleanings from the Vikalatnamas", in *Sufism in Punjab*, (eds.) Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, pp. 379–382; Sanyal, *Devotional Islam*, pp. 46–47.



Map 1. *Important shrines in selected cities in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Punjab*
Source: David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988).

Muharvi faced a daunting task in terms of bringing about the Chishtiya renaissance primarily because, in the wake of dwindling Mughal power, Sikhs, Afghans and Marathas subjected the Punjab to their predatory raids.[31] Punjab's social fabric was virtually ripped apart, and moral decadence and social disorientation among Muslims presented a grisly picture.[32] Siddiqi highlights the "dominant traits" of social and moral teachings from the *malfuzat* literature, *Khulasa't-ul Fawa'id* and *Khair-ul Afkar*, on the life and achievements of Muharvi. In these teachings, primacy was accorded to "the ethical ideals and standard of Islam" in the code of conduct and the rules of behaviour.[33] In a way, Muharvi's teachings reconciled Sufis with the *'ulama*. In their synthesis of different, if not absolutely antithetical, strands of devotional and literal Islam, the latter had preponderance over the former. Muharvi too professed strict adherence to the *shari'a* as a prerequisite for entering the fold of the *tariqah*, relegation of *wahdat al-wujud* as a discourse specific only to a chosen few and not meant for an open debate - it should

31 Siddiqi, "The Resurgence", p. 410.
32 Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Mashā'īkh-i Chisht*, pp. 26–48.
33 Siddiqi, "The Resurgence", p. 409.

be confined to only Aksal Khawas.[34] Muharvi also espoused dispensing with the ideological overtones of the controversy between *'ilm* and *irfan*.[35] In such an ambience where new convergences were forged for the sake of reforming Muslims, the syntheses of *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shahud* ideologies were thought to be imperative.[36] This synthesis served as a bridge between "the orthodox and reformist Islam of the urban areas and the syncretic and meditational forms of rural areas".[37]

Thus, *'ulama* and Chishti Sufis were drawing closer, with reformatory zeal acting as a cementing force. This newly-established affinity or Sufi-*'alim* rapprochement, in the words of Moin Nizami, was an outcome of a renewed emphasis on strict adherence to the injunctions of the *shari'a* that formed part of the Chishtiya attempt at spiritual regeneration.[38] Metcalf rightly holds that during the nineteenth century religious consciousness increased among *'ulama* as well as the Chishtiya Nizamiyah Shaikhs of the Punjab and later came to be known for the teachings of Islamic law that was the speciality of only the *'ulama*.[39] Hence, a renewed emphasis on scripture found acceptance, and in early nineteenth century the exponents of the Chishtiya revival proved quite forthcoming in embracing this trend. Muharvi, for one, sought to shun the "worn-out concept of other-worldliness" and "detachment from contemporary politics",[40] with the enthusiastic support that he lent to Muslims fighting against Sikhs when the latter had besieged Multan in the eighteenth century testifying to his stance.

Taunsa and Sial Sharif

Shams-ud-din Sialvi (1799–1883), Muharvi's 'illustrious successor' and the spiritual preceptor of Shah Sulaman Taunsvi (1770–1850) from Tuansa Sharif, district Dera Ghazi Khan, established his *khanaqah* in Sial Sharif, and directed Muslims "to cling tenaciously to the path of the Shariat, reform

34 Zakir Hussain, *Tazkīra-i Chishtīya Shāmsīya* (Lahore, 2003), p. 511.

35 Siddiqi, "The Resurgence", p. 409.

36 Qazi Javed, *Hindu-Muslim Tehzīb* (Lahore, 1983), pp. 354–356.

37 Ayesha Jalal, "Post-Orientalist Blues: Cultural Fusion and Confusion", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27, (Jan-March, 1990), p. 113.

38 Sanyal, *Devotional Islam*, p. 46.

39 Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 140.

40 He therefore exhorted his disciples to play their part in the political situation of the Punjab when Multan was threatened by successive Sikh attacks. Siddiqi, "The Resurgence", p. 410.

their manners and morals".[41] In the 1800s, Sulaman Tuansvi established the Dar-ul'Ulum, a seminary at Taunsa, in which theological as well as mystical instruction was dispensed. More importantly the study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) was 'particularly stressed' at the Dar-ul'Ulum.[42] That, indeed, was a departure from the established Chishtiya practice, since it privileged '*ulum-i zahiri* (exoteric knowledge) over *'ulum-i batiniya* (esoteric knowledge). Hence, the gradual practice of scriptural and puritanical exegesis of Islam by urban-based *'ulama* started to permeate the Chishtiya order, influencing folk Islam which was more tolerant and flexible and had been professed by Chishti Sufis since the medieval period.[43]

Khwaja Sulaiman advocated peaceful co-existence between Hindus and Muslims but "urged mystics to abstain from the company of the *bad-mazhaban* (the irreligious)".[44] Rizvi suggests that by *bad-mazhaban*, Khawja certainly meant "the *mu'tazila* and of course Shi'is".[45] If Rizvi's assertion is accepted, then this point shows the crystallisation of sectarian tendencies among Chishti Sufis in tandem with the looming influence of the *shari'a*. Such a milieu punctuated with scriptural and literalist propensities profoundly influenced Taunsvi's disciple and most eminent *khalifa* (spiritual successor) Shams-ud-din Sialvi. Shams-ud-din witnessed the oscillating fate of the Punjab, moving from being under Ranjit Singh's rule (1798–1839) to a state of sheer anarchy under his successors and then the British annexation in 1849. The proselytising bid by Christian missionaries and the response to this by various reform movements, primarily the Deobandis who called for the revival of a pristine Islam, must have exerted some influence on Shams-ud-din and his successors.[46] Therefore, he devoutly followed the edicts of the *shari'a* and rescinded practices such as *sama'bil mazaamir* (*qawwali* with music), which were presumed to be in violation of the edicts of the *shari'a*.[47] Shams-ud-din also started inviting *'ulama* to give lectures on the occasion of *'urs*. He likewise criticised *chilakashi* (40-day spiritual penance) that seemed at

---

41 *Ibid.*

42 Such texts as *Ahya-ul-'Ulūm*, *Fatūhat-i Makkīya*, *Awārī-ul Mu'arif*, *Kanz-ud-Daqā'īq* and *Kafiya* were being taught there. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, ii, p. 312.

43 Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York, 2009), p. 39.

44 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, ii, p. 314.

45 *Ibid.*

46 For overall impact of reform movements, see Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge,1989), and for particular reference to the Punjab see Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi, 1988).

47 Sayyed Muhammad Saeed, *Mīra't-ul 'Ashiqeen* (Lahore, 2006), p. 18.

variance with *shari'a* prescriptions.[48] Thus, practices rooted in the composite culture of the Punjab, which had been flagged throughout the medieval age as a distinctive feature of the Chishtis, were being purged as 'un-Islamic'. Puritanical tendencies, in this way, crept into the Chishti inner core, and the early twentieth-century rural Punjab was profoundly affected by this reform that radically transformed the character of this *silsilah*.

The reformatory streak proceeded to gain further strength among Shams-ud-din's successors. Zia-ud-din Sialvi, the grandson of Shams-ud-din Sialvi, was also a staunch follower of the *shari'a*, and this clearly resonated in the organisation of *Khanaqah-i Nizamiya* under him. It is important to reiterate here that the reformatory spirit became entrenched in all major communities, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. This spirit made an indelible impression on the spiritual leadership of popular Islam too, which was demonstrated in the establishment of the Dar ul-'Ulum Naumaniya at Lahore in 1887. Later on, in the 1920s another institution, the Dar ul-'Ulum Hizb ul-Ahnaf, was founded, which "tied the development of the Ahl-i Sunnat-o-Jamat perspective to a similar perspective being developed by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi".[49] Interestingly, the defendants of traditional forms of religious organisation turned to the newer reformist organisational models.[50] Emulating the same pattern, Sialvis also established the Dar ul-'Ulum Zia Shams-ul-Islam in the first half of the twentieth century. It was set up along modern lines but the instruction that it provided was *shari'a*-oriented. Zia-ud-din regularly invited members of the *'ulama* (such as Mo'in-ud-din Ajmeri, a scholar of *hadith*, *fiqh* and logic) to Sial Sharif to instruct its students.[51] His efforts to bridge the gap between *'ulama* and Sufis by organising lectures and meetings there significantly shaped the ideas of his successors, important among them his son Qamar-ud-din (1906–1981) and Zia-ud-din's *khalifa*, Mehr 'Ali Shah of Golra Sharif (1859–1937). Both came to follow the *shari'a* in preference to the syncretic and inclusive values that had been intrinsic to the Chishtiya *silsilah* in the medieval period. This puritanical tilt had its starkest illustration in Chishtiya castigation of the Ahmadiya movement, which emerged in 1889.[52] Mehr 'Ali Shah issued a *takfeeri fatwa* (verdict to

---

[48] Zakir Hussain, *Tazkira-i Chishtīya Shāmsīya*, p. 511.

[49] Gilmartin, "Religious Leadership", p. 492.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Ghulam Ahmad Sialvi, *Anwār-i Qamarīya* (Lahore, 2002), pp. 278–279.

[52] For the Ahmadiya Movement, see Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiya Movement: A History and Perspective* (New Delhi, 1974), and Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (New Delhi, 1988).

denounce apostasy) against the Ahmadis.[53] No precedent existed of such a *takfeeri fatwa* originating from a Chishti Sufi. Likewise, Sialvis condemned Ahmadis and participated in the Tehreek-i Khatm-i Nubuwat ('the movement for the finality of Prophet-hood', an anti-Ahmadi organisation) in the early 1950s.[54] Thus, for Sialvis, exclusion on the basis of denominational difference became an important postulate of the *shari'a*, which came to take precedence over the more traditional ties of *tariqat*.

As such, the Sufi-*'alim* divide did not last, with these two traditions being gradually brought closer together. Emphasis on foundational texts and their literal meanings came to punctuate Islamic life across these categories. In the age of Chishtiya revivalism, the diffusion of Chishti teachings was carried out through theological scriptures on *hadith* and *fiqh*. Besides the concept of *imamat*, these sources of Islamic theology represented a fundamental source of friction separating Sunnis and Shi'as. For instance, the difference between them in relation to ascertaining the authenticity of a *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) is very striking.[55] From the eighteenth century onwards, the importance of *hadith* as a source of Islamic epistemology and law was reinforced in India. Jamal Malik has gone to some lengths in mapping the transition from legalistic scholasticism to the *hadith* as the centrepiece of the Islamic theological paradigm, via such eighteenth century scholars as Shah Waliullah(1704–1762) and Nasir Andalib(1697–1758).[56] The former is particularly credited with "the introduction of Sahih Sitta in *hadith*": the Dars-i Nizami, syllabus adopted in Deoband.[57] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, in his study of Manazir Ahsan Gilani, the latter being one of the most distinguished historians of Islam in twentieth-century South Asia, also points to Deobandis "distancing themselves from the popular devotional practices" but highlights their emphasis on *hadith* that "stood in marked contrast to the importance

53 Shorish Kashmiri, *Tārīkh-i Khatam-i Nubuwwat* (Lahore, 1972), pp. 48–60.

54 Mureed Ahmad Chishti, *Fauz al-Miqāl fī Khulf-i Pīr Sīyāl, v*, (Karachi, 2008).

55 Shi'as consider only those *hadith* authentic that have been transmitted through the members of *ahl-i bait* (family of the Prophet) whereas for Sunnis numerous close companions of the Prophet are legitimate transmitters, such as Abu Hurairah, 'Abdullah bin 'Umar and Ayesha, the Prophet's wife. However, Shi'i tradition rejects the authenticity of these *ahadith*, accepting them only when their text is similar to that narrated by any member of *ahl-i bait* whom Shi'as regard the only legitimate source. See Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London, 2008), p. 86.

56 Jamal Malik, "Muslim Culture and Reform in Eighteenth-Century South Asia", *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* Series 3, 13 (2003), pp. 230–235.

57 M. Azam Qasmi, "Sufism and the Founders of Deoband: A Study of Their Understanding and Responses", in *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Society and Politics in India*, (eds.) Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi, 2006), p. 346.

of rational sciences - notably logic and philosophy - had long enjoyed in the scholarly tradition of the 'Ulama' in India".[58] Similarly Robinson delineates two changes bringing about a transition in learning "from the rational sciences to transmitted sciences" and even more significantly "the complete rejection of the past scholarship".[59] Thus, Indo-Muslim civilisation drifted away from what Robinson has called its "great traditions", most probably in sense of a civilisation that originated and subsequently blossomed in the Iranian, Timurid and Mughal worlds, and gravitated instead towards what he describes as "the pristine inspiration of Arabia and the first community at Medina".[60] It is equally important to note the change in the nature of the *pir-murid* relationship, as closer contacts between the Sufis and the *hadith* scholars resulted in "more stress being placed on the doctrinal aspects of Sufism".[61]

The most glaring outcome of this shift was the widening sectarian gulf between Shi'as and Sunnis over the interpretation of *hadith*. A more detailed examination of such differences lies outside the parameters of this study; suffice to say, the emphasis on *hadith* and *fiqh* led to the scriptural exegesis of Islamic faith, which, as subsequent events demonstrated, perpetuated exclusionary and sectarian strands in both the Sunni and Shi'i traditions.[62] Another point that Robinson propounds pertains to the Prophet "as the perfect model for human life", which came to play a significant part in "South Asian Muslim piety".[63] For Barelvi piety, the Prophet was even more central, and Ahmed Raza Khan's *wujudi* formulation *nur-i Muhammadi*[64] cemented the Prophet's centrality which came at an expense of the seminal position that of the *pir* during the medieval era.

Thus the personality of the Prophet and the emphasis on *hadith* as an important part of the foundational-text created a new Islamic oeuvre in the

58 Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Studying *Hadith* in a Madrasa in the Early Twentieth Century", in *Islam in South Asia in practice*, (ed.) Barbara D. Metcalf (New Delhi, 2009), p. 226.

59 Francis Robinson, "Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asian in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (January 2013), pp. 1–21.

60 *Ibid*.

61 Moin Nizami, *Reform and Renewal in South Asian Islam,* p. 265.

62 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, administrators in religious schools stressed the study of *hadith.* For more on this, see Zaman, "Studying *Hadith*", pp. 225–239.

63 Robinson, "Strategies of Authority", p. 4.

64 *Nur-i Muhammadi* is the idea that there was a light of Muhammad, derived from God's own light, which had existed from the beginning of creation. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, pp. 300–312.

subcontinent in which the significance of the saint and shrine substantially receded. The emergence of sectarian fault lines between Muslims was another implication of that paradigmatic shift. The sectarian conflict, particularly between Sunnis and Shiʿas, emanated from their respective views about the first three 'rightly guided' Caliphs, namely Abu Bakr, ʿUmar and Uthman. How the fraternal enmity between the two sects came about in relation to the disputed legitimacy of the first three Caliphs, will accordingly be addressed in the next section.

Shiʿa polemic and the first three Caliphs

The interplay between Sunni and Shiʿi revivalisms cannot be ignored in order to establish a clear understanding of the intensity that sectarianism acquired in twentieth-century northern India and its particular reflection in the Punjab. In the eighteenth century, Shiʿi ascendancy came about in Awadh, with Faizabad and later on Lucknow becoming the hub of Shiʿa revivalism.[65] Besides, as Rizvi notes, Shiʿism also had gained popularity in Delhi and Panipat and it also had started winning numerous followers in the Punjab and Sindh.[66] Awadh thus cast a striking influence over the Punjab's Shiʿi populace, and numerous Shiʿi scholars from different parts of the Punjab went to Awadh to seek religious instruction.

Indeed, the emergence of Shiʿi rule in Awadh, the growth of Usuli *ʿulama* and the proliferation of Shiʿas in the Punjab played a significant part in further motivating Chishti revisionism, which by that time had begun to contest the validity of the fundamental tenets of Shiʿism. The same was true in reverse, for the most important Shiʿa scholar of Nawabi Awadh, the *mujtahid* Dildar ʿAli Nasirabadi, started around the turn of the nineteenth century castigating Sufi beliefs and practices such as the concept of *wahdat-al-wujud*, the doctrine of *kashf* (inspiration), *wajd* (mystical ecstasy) and practices like singing, dancing and beating drums.[67] Dildar ʿAli's criticism evoked an acerbic response from Sufis in Awadh, straining the relations between the two, and such debates also began to resonate in Punjab.

---

65 An Iranian émigré Mir Muhammad Amin Nishapuri Saʿadat ʿAli Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk (died in 1739) founded Shiʿi rule in Awadh in 1722 with Faizabad as its capital. Mirza Muhammad Muqeem Abul Mansur Khan Safdarjang (died in 1753) and Shujah-ud-daula became Nawabs respectively. For details, see Juan R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 40–55.

66 S. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna-Ashari Shiʿis in India*, ii (New Delhi, 1986), p. 72.

67 Rizvi, "Shi'ism and Sufism", p. 382; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, pp. 152–157.

In addition, what alarmed Sunni *'ulama* as well as Sufis in Punjab was Shi'i proselytisation. In Gujrat (Punjab, Pakistan) Rizvi describes how some of the descendants of Makhdum Jahaniyan Shaikh Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, (1308–1387)[68] embraced Shi'ism. Similarly the guardians of the Uch *khanaqah* accepted Shi'ism. Several *sayyid* and *tafdiliya* families from Punjab began to renounce their Sunni faith.[69] Ironically, however, Rizvi does not mention the time or the year for this denominational conversion. Rough estimates gleaned from his monumental account of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'as in India point fleetingly to the mid-nineteenth century as the time when it took place in some parts of the Punjab.[70] Shah Jiwana and Rojoa Sa'adat, prominent *sayyid* families from Jhang District, may well have embraced Shi'ism by then. Similarly in the late-nineteenth century, graduates of the defunct Asaf-ud-daulah seminary of Lucknow travelled throughout North India to spread Usuli teachings. One such Usuli *'alim*, Abul Qasim Rizvi (1833–1906), vigorously promoted Usuli Shi'ism in Lahore and its surroundings, founding congregational prayer mosques in the city and also an Imami seminary (in 1879) with the financial backing of Nawab 'Ali Raza Khan Qizilbash.[71] Highly influential families, like the Qizilbash, Faqir and Gardizi in Multan, contributed immensely in spreading the Shi'i faith in the Punjab in the latter part of the nineteenth century.[72]

In these circumstances, when Shi'i ranks were swelling, it could be argued that Sialvi *pir*s would have regarded Shi'i influence to be increasingly and uncomfortably encroaching upon their area of spiritual influence. Sayyid Muhammad Ghaus, Sayyid Chiragh Shah, Sardar Husain Shah and Sayyid Ghulam 'Abbas were among the Shi'a Rajoa Sayyids in Chiniot *tehsil* of Jhang District who held positions of pre-eminence under British rule. The colonial *Gazetteer of Jhang District* of 1883–84 contained information about the presence of Shi'as, which would have been alarming to the *pir*s of Sial Sharif:

---

68 Makhdum Jahaniyan Shaikh Jalal-ud-din Bukhari was Suhrwardiya Sufi. He settled in Uch, a town in South Punjab. He had taken an oath of allegiance with Baha-ul-Haq Zakariya Multani (died in 1335 A. D). See for further detail, Javed, *Punjab Key Sufi Danishwar*, pp. 102–119.

69 Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna-Ashari Shi'is*, ii, p. 72. *Tafdiliya* refers to those Sunnis who proclaim their belief in Imam 'Ali's superiority *(tafdil)* over the other claimants to the Caliphate while not disputing the legitimacy of the three leaders who preceded 'Ali in the office.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 332–334.

71 Hasan, "Sectarianism in Indian Islam", p. 224. For Abu Qasim, see Akhter Rahi, *Tazkira-i 'Ulamā-i Punjāb*, i (Lahore, 1998), pp. 51–52.

72 Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna-Ashari Shi'is*, ii, p. 333.

> Shi'as are unusually numerous in Jhang, a fact due to the influence of the Shi'a Kuraishis of Shorkot and Hassu Balel, and the Sayads of Uch who are connected with the famous Sayad family of Belot in Dera Ismael Khan District and Shah Jiwana and Rajoa in the Jhang District. They are the most bigoted type. They observe the Muharram most strictly, abstaining from all luxuries for the first ten days of the month, and on the 10th they accompany the Taziahs bareheaded and bare-footed. They throw dust on their heads and beat their breasts with extreme violence, and allow neither Hindu nor Muhammadan to approach the Taziah without baring his head and removing his shoes.[73]

In 1929, the *District Gazetteer* likewise explained the increasing hold of Shi'as in the district: "Shi'ism is on the increase in the district. The influx of wealth on account of canal irrigation has invested some Sayyid families with added importance, and has proved helpful in spreading Shi'ism".[74] Sayyid Khizar Hayat from the Shah Jiwana Sayyids, who "have been of importance", was virtually reared by the British as a ward of Court. His younger brother Mubarak Shah, and Sayyid Raja Shah's son 'Abid Husain, rapidly achieved fame that still resonates in the latter's daughter 'Abida Husain and her cousin and arch rival Faisal Salih Hayat.[75] From the emergence of these centres, one can infer a clear increase in Shi'i influence during this period.[76] Since these families were devout Shi'as, many people including Qamar-ud-din looked upon them with extraordinary suspicion for manoeuvring sectarian loyalties for political gain. These families provided patronage to Shi'as in Jhang and its surrounding areas. Qamar-ud-din witnessed the bulging number of Shi'as in the area surrounding Sial Sharif taking part in various *munazaras* (religious disputations) with Sunnis, such as in Shah Jiwana, Kalowal (Chaniot) and Jhang.[77] As also evident in his book *Mazhab-i Shi'a* (1957), the major point of contention between Sunnis and Shi'as in those *munazaras* were the first three Sunni Caliphs. In it, Qamar-ud-din dissects what, to him, amounted to Shi'i sacrilegious representation of the first three Caliphs by citing their own texts,

---

73 *Gazetteer of the Jhang District 1883–84*, p. 50. Drawing on the Census of 1881, it states that the total number of Muslims in the district was 326,919, among whom 11, 835 were Shi'i and only eight Wahhabis.

74 *Gazetteer of the Jhang District 1929* (Lahore, 2000), p. 69.

75 Siddiq Sadiq, *Jhang: The Land of Two Rivers* (Jhang,2002), pp. 217–218.

76 Shi'i activists were sent to Lucknow at the behest of Mubarak 'Ali Shah, a leading member of the Shah Jiwana clan. Bilal Zubairi, *Tārīkh-i Jhāng* (Jhang, 1973), p. 371; Siddiq Sadiq, *Jhang*, pp. 237–238.

77 Mureed Ahmad Chishti, *Fauz al-Miqāl fī Khulf-i Pīr Sīyāl*, iv, (Karachi, 1989), pp. 560–561.

such as *Kashf-ul Ghuma fi Manaqib-ul Ai'ma*, *Nasikh-ul Tawarikh*, *Asul-i Ka'afi* and *Nahj-ul Balagha*, while pleading complete *bonhomie* between 'Ali and the rest of the Caliphs.

'Rawafiz' and Mazhab-i Shi'a

It is against the above background that the chapter, entitled '*Rawafiz*', in Shams-ud-din Sialvi's *Malfuzat Miraat-ul 'Ashiqeen* translated from Persian by Ghulam Nizam-ud-din Maurolvi and put together by his disciple Muhammad Sa'id, can be discussed. The exact date of the conversation on which the narrative is based is not known, though tentatively speaking, the late nineteenth century seems plausible. That book could not be published before 1970, almost 90 years after Sialvi s death. The other text under review is Qamar-ud-din's book *Mazhab-i Shi'a* (1957). In addition to Shi'a influence, it is important to differentiate between the late colonial period and the early post-independence period of Pakistan which is reflected in these writings, one sample of which will be scrutinised below. The colonial period was, as we have seen, a period of competing revivalisms, marked by the emergence of a politics of religious identity that pitted Sunnis against, first, Ahmadis and, later, Shi'a, against a backdrop of intense conflict about the role of religion in public life.

Hagiographical accounts of Shams-ud-din, such as *Fauz-ul Miqal fi Khulafa-i Pir Sial*, make no reference to his disapproval of Shi'as. However his *malfuzat Mira't-ul-'Ashiqeen* contains a chapter on *Rawafiz* (denoting Shi'as). The very caption of this chapter reveals much about the content of the text, which seems to be a response to Usuli Shi'as and their criticism of the first three 'rightly guided' Caliphs. *Rawafiz* is the plural of *rafzi* (from the root *rafda*), an Arabic word used for a person in the army who has deserted the leader. Historically, it is a reference to a certain sect (of Shi'as) who deserted Zeyd, the son of 'Ali when he forbade them to speak against the Companions of the Prophet. Subsequently "this appellation became applied to all persons transgressing in this way",[78] and the term has come to be applied by some Sunni *'ulama* towards Shi'as. Generally *rafda* came to be understood to mean repudiation of the legitimacy of the first three Caliphs.

The style of the chapter under scrutiny is conversational; with Shams-ud-din responding to the questions asked him by his disciples. His emphatic

[78] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, iii (Beirut, 1968), p. 1121. According to Qamar-ud-din Sialvi, Zeyd was the son of Zain-ul 'Abideen. See Qamar-ud-din Sialvi, *Mazhab-i Shi'a* (Lahore, 2011), p. 39.

advice to them is that the faith is not complete (*iman-i kamil*) until one accepts all the Companions, righteous and truthful.[79] Similarly he cites ʻAli, Imam Muhammad Baqir and Imam Jaʻfar Sadiq to prove Shiʻi sacrilege against the Companions to be a malicious concoction. These persons, according to Shams-ud-din, held the three rightly-guided Caliphs of Muslims in high esteem. The Companions of the Prophet, in his contention, generally lived in complete harmony. He dismisses the animosity between ʻAli and Zubair that was triggered during the Battle of Camel, fought between ʻAli and Ayesha.[80] In the battle, Talha and Zubair were on the side of Ayesha, later trenchantly castigated by Shiʻas. Shams-ud-din considers Shiʻi condemnation of Talha and Zubair unjustifiable and cites ʻAli to prove his point that Talha and Zubair would be sitting beside him (ʻAli) in Paradise.[81] When asked about the Shiʻi belief whereby ʻAli's piety outranks that of the three rightly-guided Caliphs, Shams-ud-din attests that the status of all four is exactly commensurate with the positions that they held in the Caliphate. This assertion ironically calls into question the centrality that ʻAli holds as the spiritual forbear of Chishtis.

It is here that Shruti Kapila's understanding of violence based on the concept of 'fraternal enmity' can be used to provide a theoretical underpinning to the question of Chishti-Shiʻi animosity.[82] Chishtis and Shiʻas were bound by a mystical 'fraternity' as both groups unequivocally revered ʻAli and the *ahl–i bait*. ʻAli's importance had been second only to the Prophet in the spiritual hierarchy of Chishtis. Shams-ud-din, by relegating him to the fourth rank, committed 'conceptual violence'. This conceptual violence then resulted in the conversion of Shiʻas to the Sunni faith as reported in *Mirat-ulʻAshiqeen*, with a few Shiʻas like Ahmad Khan Baluch converted to the Hanafi (Sunni) faith by Khwaja Taunswi,[83] underlining the extent to which the sectarian wedge had split Chishtis and Shiʻas by the mid-nineteenth century. The seminal position that the figure of ʻAli traditionally held in the spiritual hierarchy of the Chishti *silsilah* was now substantially eroded. Nevertheless, his disapproval of Shiʻas notwithstanding, Sham-ud-din stops short of

79 Saeed, *Mīraʼt-ulʻAshiqeen*, p. 183.

80 Jang-i-Jamal took place in 656 A.D, in Basra. Talha and Zubair were close companions of the Prophet and sided with Ayesha in the battle of Camel against ʻAli; both were killed.

81 *Ibid*.

82 This conception of 'fraternal enmity' invokes the primacy of violence as a means of transformation of the meaning and practices of the political in India and asserts that violence, whether conceptual or otherwise, was of meaning only when directed against the intimate. See Shruti Kapila, "A History of Violence", *Modern Intellectual History*, 7, 2 (August 2010), pp. 437–457.

83 Saeed, *Mīraʼt-ulʻAshiqeen*, pp. 183–184.

designating them as *kafir* (unbeliever). Depreciation of the Companions by certain Shi'as is at the heart of his condemnation of them as *rawafiz*.

Qamar-ud-din Sialvi's 125-page book *Mazhab-i Shi'a*, published in 1957, is significant for its rarity as, unlike other *malfuzat* literature, it was authored by the Sialvi *pir* himself. It has the same central theme that underlines Shi'i disrespect for the Caliphs. However he tangentially interrogates the Shi'i tradition of *taqiyah* (pious dissimulation) and their alleged disapproval over the claimed adulterations (*tehrif*) in the compilation of the Quran.[84] Sialvi argues that the fundamentals of the Shi'i sect are predicated on selective prophetic traditions: Shi'as disapprove of most of the Prophet's Companions and therefore consider the *hadith* narrated by them to be inauthentic. He believes that Shi'i literature (such as *Usul-i kafi*, *Tafsir-i kafi* and *Nasikh-ul Tawarikh*) exaggerates religious traditions and historical events. For instance, one Shi'i tradition suggests that those who do not follow Shi'i doctrines are non-believers; another tradition states that the angel Gabriel came to the Prophet with 17,000 verses but the Sunnis' Quran comprises only 6,666 verses.[85] Sialvi quotes a number of *hadith*s and Quranic verses to contest such Shi'i assertions and beliefs. His critique of the Shi'i sect shows his deep understanding of Shi'i beliefs and Sunni puritanical traditions. Sometimes he uses Shi'i literature itself to question their beliefs. He quotes 'Ali's tradition in which he himself predicted the emergence of *rawafiz* who would criticise the Prophet's Companions and order their killing because they were non-believers.[86] The *leitmotif* of this narrative is the Caliphs in particular and Companions of the Prophet in general. In this way, Shi'i criticism of the Caliphs became a main reason for the widening gulf between the Chishti Sufis and the adherents of the Shi'i sect.

From the eighteenth century onwards, therefore, Shi'a-Sunni (read Chishti here) antagonism appears to be predicated on their respective perceptions of the first three Caliphs. Chishti *pir*s, assuming an antithetical position vis-à-vis Shi'as, marked a departure from their fundamental postulates which, in their very essence, should have transcended any sectarian persuasion. With the onset of Chishtiya revivalism, the proponents of that *silsilah* shunned to a substantial extent its all-inclusive character and redefined what they believed in the light of foundational texts. Sialvi *pirs* represented this trend whereby the *shari'a* came to hold centrality in the re-defined Chishtiya belief system. The proselytization of Usuli Shi'ism in the Punjab exacerbated

84 Sialvi, *Mazhab-i Shi'a*.
85 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–26.
86 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

sectarian differences. These developments were construed in myriad ways, one of which had been Qamar-ud-din Sialvi's anti-Shi'a zeal, articulated in the *Mazhab-I Shi'a*.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to chart the rocky relationship between Chishtis and Shi'as from the twelfth century to the recent past. This journey commenced from 'shared synergies' and ended up in a state of stark divergence. The process of mutual exclusivity between the two began in the nineteenth century and continued steadily in the twentieth. Revivalism affected both groups during the eighteenth century and resulted in the sharpening of sectarian identities. The Sialvi *pirs*' unflinching engagement with the *shari'a* led them to deploy foundational texts for knowledge dissemination in their seminaries. Thus *hadith* found a central place in their education system as the major source of knowledge, something that also proved instrumental in bringing Chishtis closer to the 'puritans'. Thus it was this puritanical streak that profoundly influenced Chishtiya ideology at the expense of its proverbial *weltanschauung* that had long been anchored in the more inclusive ethos of *wahdat al-wujud*.

8 Third Wave Shi'ism
Sayyid 'Arif Husain al-Husaini and the Islamic Revolution in Pakistan[1]

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs

Pakistan's Shi'as barely had time to celebrate the energising success of the Iranian Revolution.[2] The events of 1979 endowed them overnight with a sudden but ultimately only illusory claim to the leadership of Islamism.[3] Already the early 1980s witnessed rising tides of anti-Shi'i sentiments instead. Even though sectarian violence was hardly foreign to South Asia, the following decades bore witness to a far deadlier climate.[4] The Islamisation initiatives of General Zia ul-Haq (r. 1979–1988), with their exclusive focus on the implementation of Hanafi *fiqh*, prepared the ground for an unprecedented

1 The author would like to thank Ali Usman Qasmi, Justin Jones, Mirjam Künkler, Christophe Jaffrelot, Andreas Rieck, Mariam Abou Zahab, Laurence Louër, Muhammad Qasim Zaman and the anonymous reviewers of the JRAS for their extremely valuable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

2 This article is only concerned with Twelver Shi'as (*ithna 'ashariyya*). For the Isma'ili minority, see W. Holzwarth, *Die Ismailiten in Nordpakistan: Zur Entwicklung einer religiösen Minderheit im Kontext neuer Außenbeziehungen* (Berlin, 1994), and M. Marsden, *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 193–238.

3 V. Nasr, "The Iranian Revolution and changes in Islamism in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan", in *Iran and the Surrounding World. Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, (eds.) N. R. Keddie and R. P. Matthee (Seattle, 2002), p. 334.

4 For a detailed listing of deaths related to sectarian violence in this time period, see T. Kamran, "Contextualizing sectarian militancy in Pakistan: A case study of Jhang", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, XX, 1 (2009), pp. 81–82. For a recent, excellent discussion on late colonial manifestations of sectarianism that also points to the importance of internal debates within the Shi'i community, see J. Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India. Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 186–238.

rise of inter-sectarian tensions in Pakistan.[5] Radical and politicised lay activists were drawn to ever more uncompromising groups.[6] Additionally, the *jihad* against Soviet forces in neighbouring Afghanistan as a training ground for militants figured importantly in the equation on the Sunni side.[7] The latter was coupled with Saudi-Arabian 'humanitarian aid' that extended to the financing of virulently anti-Shi'a tracts such as Ihsan Ilahi Zahir's *Al-Shi'a wa-l-Sunna* that claimed Shi'ism to be "the religion of falsehood (*din al-kidhb*), and the religion of deceit and cunning (*din al-khida wa-l-makr*), and telling lies for ever and ever; and there is no escape from it".[8] Scholars have also noted triggering socio-economic factors, for example rivalries between a rising Sunni middle class and locally dominant Shi'i landholders, aggravated through labour migration to the Gulf.[9]

Given these turbulent times, it is thus not surprising that the existing literature on the Shi'i community of Pakistan has so far taken much more interest in inter-sectarian conflict than in the changes which affected Shi'i thought post-1979. The precise influences of the 'Iranian moment' are far more often assumed than actually established, as demonstrated by the following, rather typical statement:

---

[5] It is not my intention in this paper to evaluate the sincerity of these measures. For a critique of them as "Islamically legitimised politics of state penetration", see J. Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 340–341.

[6] F. Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York, 2009), pp. 105–108.

[7] V. Nasr, "The rise of Sunni militancy in Pakistan: The changing role of Islamism and the Ulama in society and politics", *Modern Asian Studies*, XXXIV, 1 (2000), pp. 144–145.

[8] I. I. Ẓahīr, *Al-Shīʿa wa-l-Sunna* (Lahore, 2008), p. 184. Zahir himself was assassinated in 1987. See M. Abou Zahab, "The SSP: Herald of militant Sunni Islam in Pakistan", in *Armed Militias of South Asia: Fundamentalists, Maoists and Separatists*, (eds.) L. Gayer and C. Jaffrelot (New York, 2009), pp. 167–168.

[9] M. Q. Zaman, "Sectarianism in Pakistan: The radicalization of Shi'i and Sunni identities", *Modern Asian Studies*, XXXII, 3 (1998), pp. 709–713. Kamran argues that sectarianism was used by influential rural families as an extension of intra-*biradari* [kinship group] politics (Kamran, "Contextualizing sectarian militancy", pp. 62–65). See also M. Abou Zahab, "The Sunni–Shia conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)", in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, (eds.) I. Ahmad and H. Reifeld (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 135–148. See for a discussion that questions the decisiveness of Saudi influence on sectarian thought in Pakistan but instead emphasizes how local Deobandi scholars creatively drew on South Asian intellectual traditions in order to counter the political threat which in their view Shi'i Islam constituted after the Iranian revolution, my paper, "*Abū Muʿāwiya's Longings for the State. The dialectics of the local and the transnational in Shīʿī-Sunnī sectarianism*", presented at the workshop 'Center and Periphery in the Muslim World: De-Centering Traditional Religious Authority', The Center for the Study of Contemporary Muslims Societies, Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, Doha, Qatar, 31 March - 01 April 2014.

> As a consequence of the Iranian Revolution and the resultant Shi‘i religiopolitical activism, Shi‘ism in Pakistan became more centralised, more clericalist, more Iranianised, and more integrated with the international Shi‘i community. The revolution especially reinforced the emotional and religious bonds of Pakistani Shi‘ah with Iran and its religiocultural centres.[10]

How are we to understand these manifestations of the ‘esprit de Qom’, which in Sabrina Mervin’s view is not only “a revolutionary spirit, but also a certain concept of Islamic modernity which all can adapt and apply after returning to their own societies”?[11] Mariam Abou Zahab hints at the complexity of this process. According to her, nearly 4,000 students received scholarships from the Iranian government immediately after the revolution to spend between six months and a year in religious institutions, mostly in Qom. Upon their return to Pakistan, they toured the Punjabi countryside and the Northern Areas, showing films on the oppression of the Shah’s regime and the success of the revolution:

> They criticised the traditional *ulama* and their links to Iraq and accused them of being apolitical, quietist and opposed to the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. Although the traditional clergy welcomed the revolution because it had replaced a secular anti-*ulama* monarchy with a government of the *ulama*, it was opposed to Khomeini’s revolutionary rhetoric and saw the students’ activism as a threat to its own authority.[12]

Yet, the ‘traditional’ *‘ulama* were not able simply to dismiss these crash-course propagandists. Even within their own ranks politicised clergy gained prominence, denoting a ‘third wave’ of Shi‘i thought in Pakistan that was much more activist and less concerned with debates over theology, the status of the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bait*) or reform of customs – topics that were intimately connected to two earlier intellectual centres for South Asian Shi‘as: Lucknow in northern India and later Najaf in Iraq.[13] This development manifested itself in the rise of Sayyid ‘Arif Husain al-Husaini (d. 1988) to

---

[10] M. Ahmed, “Shi‘i political activism in Pakistan”, *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, pp. 5, 1–2 (2003), p. 64. For a similar statement, see O. Roy, “The impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Middle East”, in *The Shi‘a Worlds and Iran*, (ed.) S. Mervin (London, 2010), pp. 35–36, and also A. H. Syed, “The Sunni–Shia conflict in Pakistan”, in *Pakistan. Founder’s Aspirations and Today’s Realities*, (ed.) H. Malik (Karachi, 2001), p. 255.

[11] S. Mervin, “Introduction”, in *The Shi‘a Worlds and Iran*, (ed.) S. Mervin, p. 17.

[12] M. Abou Zahab, “The politicization of the Shia community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s”, in *The other Shiites. From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, (eds.) A. Monsutti, S. Naef and F. Sabahi (Bern, 2007), pp. 100–101.

[13] See below for a discussion of the different camps to which Shi‘i scholars belonged.

the helm of Pakistan's major Shiʿi organisation at that time, the *Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Jaʿfariyya* [Movement for the Implementation of Jaʿfari Law, hereafter TNFJ][14] in 1984. He has been described as being "probably the most ardent admirer of Khomeini among Pakistan's Shia *ʿulamâʾ* of his generation and status".[15] Mariam Abou Zahab credits him with intensifying the 'qomization' of the *ʿulama* class with regard to the 'rationalization'[16] and 'politicization' of rituals, which now focused on the oppression committed by enemies of the Shiʿa at home and abroad.[17] Iranian publications likewise extol him for spreading the idea of the Islamic Revolution under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, thereby breaking the monopoly of influence that wealthy landholders and non-political, conservative circles had enjoyed over the Shiʿi community.[18]

It may be that Sayyid ʿArif Husain al-Husaini's status as an outsider fostered his unlikely career. Born into a humble, non-scholarly family in late 1946,[19] he grew up close to Parachinar, the capital of the Kurram agency in north-west Pakistan's tribal areas. His first religious training took place

14 The term *jaʿfari* relates to the sixth Shiʿi Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 765) who outlined the broad strokes of Shiʿi theories on the Imamate. *Jaʿfari* became increasingly used during the twentieth century in the context of energetic efforts to recast Shiʿism as a fifth school of law (*madhhab*) along with the four established Sunni schools, culminating in an interview (and later *fatwa*) given by the *Shaikh al-Azhar* Mahmud Shaltut in 1959. Shaltut went as far as declaring that Muslims are free to attach themselves to any of the five schools. See R. Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: the Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Brill, 1996), pp. 289–293.

15 See A. Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan. An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority* (forthcoming), p. 249. I am grateful to Dr Andreas Rieck for sharing several chapters of his yet unpublished book with me. Please note that the page numbers of the final printed version will most likely differ from this manuscript. Ahmed goes even further than Rieck when claiming that "probably single-handedly, ʿArif al-Hussaini internationalised Pakistan's Shiʿi clergy" (Ahmed, "Political activism", p. 66).

16 This is of course a rather problematic term and reflects first of all Iranian views on the "extreme (*ifrati)*" forms of traditional Shiʿi ritual in Pakistan. See D. Nuʿaimiyan, *Bāztāb-i inqilāb dar Pākistān.* Markaz-i Isnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī: http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/5412/default.aspx (accessed 1 June 2012).

17 Unfortunately, Abou Zahab only provides some examples of how Iranian slogans in the vein of *Kull yaum ʿAshura, kull ard Karbala* [Every day is ʿAshura, every piece of land is Karbala] were gaining prominence at Shiʿi gatherings. See Abou Zahab, "The politicization", pp. 108–109.

18 M. Nuṣūḥiyān, *Shīʿiyān-i Pākistān va Inqilāb-i Islāmī-yi Īrān*. See Markaz-i Isnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, www.irdc.ir/fa/content/5593/default.aspx (accessed 1 June 2012).

19 None of his biographers discuss whether his *sayyid* pedigree facilitated his career. His family traces their lineage back to a grandchild of al-Husain (d. 680), Husain al-Asghar, son of Zain al-ʿAbidin (d. 713).

locally before he undertook in 1967 the journey to Najaf where he spent six years studying. He was introduced to Khomeini by Ayatollah Asadullah Madani (d. 1981), one of the former's strongest supporters in Najaf.[20] Al-Husaini's biographers credit him with a very activist stance towards the Iraqi authorities. After travelling to Kufa to pay a solidarity visit to Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980),[21] who had just been put under house arrest, al-Husaini reportedly attacked some policemen, who were busy abusing Shiʿi students. Additionally, he kept sending protest telegrams to the Shah.[22] This outspoken attitude most likely curtailed his stay in Iraq: in 1973, he was either deported from Iraq or left the country voluntarily in order to get married.[23] His official biography reports that his main goal was to spread revolutionary ideas. A letter of appointment as Khomeini's representative (*wakil*) in Pakistan was forcibly taken away from him at the Iranian border.[24] Al-Husaini returned to Pakistan for several months before continuing his studies in Qom. Once again, he was at the forefront of the fight against the Shah, encouraging fellow Pakistani students to join protests.[25] Abou Zahab maintains that he intended to remain in Qom for a longer period of time, yet was "sent back to Pakistan in 1977 with a mission to mobilise the community on the pattern of what Imam Musa Sadr had done in Lebanon".[26] Other accounts argue that he was expelled from Iran after refusing to sign a document not to mingle with revolutionary clerics.[27] Back in Pakistan, al-Husaini earned his first credentials as a community leader in Parachinar in 1980 when he led popular protests after attacks on Shiʿi Muharram processions and was consequently imprisoned for 22 days.[28] Despite these activities, he was still largely unknown

---

[20] T. R. Khān, *Zindağīnāmah-i ʿallāmah shahīd ʿĀrif Ḥusain al-Ḥusainī az vilādat tā shahādat* (Qom, 1990), p. 155. Al-Husaini refers to him as his main teacher. See al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 107–108. For full biographical references of all literature on al-Husaini, see footnote 32.

[21] On his life and influence in the Iraqi context and beyond, see C. Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shiʿi International* (Cambridge, 1995).

[22] Khan singles him out as the only Pakistani student to do so. See Khān, *Safīr-i nūr*, p. 41. See also S. G. H. Ṣādiqī, "ʿAllāmah Sayyid ʿArif Ḥusain Ḥusainī", in *Satārgān-i Ḥaram*, (eds.) *Gurūhī āz nivīsandigān-i farhang-i kauṣar* (Qom, 2004), p. 84.

[23] For the former view, see Zaman, "Sectarianism", p. 695; for the latter, Abou Zahab, "The politicization", p. 105.

[24] Khān, *Safīr-i Nūr*, p. 43.

[25] Naqvī, *Taẕkira*, p. 156.

[26] Abou Zahab, "The politicization", p. 106.

[27] Khān, *Zindagīnāmah*, p. 27.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

when the TNFJ convention in February 1984 unexpectedly elected him as leader, due to his "energy, courage, political acumen and religious learning".[29]

The broad acknowledgement of al-Husaini's crucial leadership role within the *imami* community during the 1980s has not been supplemented with a more detailed study of his thought. Existing scholarship has been more concerned with debates among Pakistani Shiʿi scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, not allowing for the fundamental changes within religious reasoning in the wake of the Iranian revolution.[30] The goal of this article, therefore, is partially to fill this gap and to supplement our knowledge on the prevalent discourses in the early 1980s among the "new Shiites", as Abou Zahab terms them – religious scholars who were educated in Iran rather than in Iraq. I am interested in exploring how al-Husaini adapted the universal Iranian message to the particular minority situation in Pakistan. Outside pressures from the Pakistani state were not the only factor that forced him to do so. Rather, internal challenges and divisions among the Shiʿi community played a far more crucial role in these modifications. Additionally, al-Husaini could rely on a strong indigenous, Pakistani tradition of Shiʿi mobilisation and opposition to the state that did not owe its vigour to Iranian encouragement. To be sure, al-Husaini, as a busy community leader with a very active political life, never seems to have found the time to express his thoughts in writing.[31] This lacuna can be compensated, however, by the available, extensive collections, in both Urdu and Persian, of speeches and interviews delivered by al-Husaini throughout his career that were transcribed from recordings after his death.[32]

---

[29] Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 250–251.

[30] S. H. A. Naqvi, "The controversy about the Shaykhiyya tendency among Shia ʿUlamāʾ in Pakistan", in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, (eds.) R. Brunner and W. Ende (Leiden, 2001), pp. 135–149. Andreas Rieck in his excellent study mainly discusses the rise of al-Husaini to the leadership and his confrontational relationship with the government. See Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 247–259.

[31] Al-Husaini himself referred to a treatise he planned to write in order to counter allegations that Shiʿas believe in the corruption of the Qurʾanic text (*tahrif*) but had to delegate these plans because of his busy schedule. See Sayyid ʿĀrif Ḥusain al-Ḥusainī, *Mis̱āq-i khūn. Avāʾil-i qiyādat aur ḥawzah-i ʿilmiyyah ke mutaʿaliq shahīd qāʾid ke khiṭabāt* (Lahore, 1997), p. 165. There are no written works by al-Husaini referenced in Sayyid Ḥusain ʿĀrif Naqvī's biographical dictionary *Taẕkirah-i ʿulamāʾ-i imāmiyah-i Pākistān* (Mashhad, 1991). The bibliographical collection of Shiʿi Urdu texts by the same author, *Barr-i ṣaghīr ke imāmiyah muṣannifīn kī maṭbūʿah taṣānīf aur tarājim* (Islamabad, 1997), likewise only lists a couple of short pamphlets written on the life of Sayyid ʿArif Husain al-Husaini (see vol. 1, p. 484, and vol. 2, pp. 453, 512).

[32] Besides *Misāq-i khūn*, I am drawing on *Guftār-i ṣidq. Maʿārif-i Qurʾān ō taʿlīmāt-i ahl-i bait shahīd-i maẓlūm ke khiṭabāt* (Lahore, 1996), *Sukhan-i ʿishq. Majālis-i ʿazā sayyid al-shuhadāʾ* (Lahore, 1996), *Uslūb-i siyāsat. Islām-i Muḥammad ke ijrāʾ aur*

Many of these also include question and answer sessions that provide us with a feel for the way the audience was reacting to his declarations.[33] This material has been supplemented with various detailed biographical dictionaries of Pakistani Shiʿi scholars, al-Husaini's 'official' biography published by the al-ʿArif Academy in Lahore[34] and issues of the Pakistani Shiʿi weekly *Rizakar*.

The remainder of this article first sheds light on how al-Husaini as a representative of 'third-wave Shiʿism' in Pakistan differed from other scholarly camps in the country and how the strength of these groups and the previous experience of confronting the government, in turn, amended his revolutionary message. To achieve this goal, I will briefly review both the emergence of Shiʿi political activism in Pakistan as well as the character of internal intellectual debates and divisions among *imami* scholars. These two aspects will provide the background for an evaluation of the new Shiʿi rhetoric after the Iranian revolution. This will be included in the final section, where I shall be attempting a detailed analysis of al-Husaini's thought.

The character of Shiʿi activism before 1979

During Pakistan's first three decades as a new state, the chances of political organising along religious, Shiʿi lines seemed a rather remote possibility. Compared to their co-religionists in Lebanon or Iraq,[35] for example, Pakistan's Shiʿa minority hardly qualified as being among the oppressed of the earth. Many of the Muslim League's early leaders were Shiʿas. The community was prominently represented among the dominant landholders, the military, the local and federal bureaucracy as well as in the industrial and entrepreneurial elite. Each successive Pakistani government involved Shiʿi ministers.[36] This relative influence has led some observers to conclude that despite occasional riots during the month of Muharram, most Shiʿas did not feel discriminated

ʿālamī umūr par qāʾid shahīd ke khiṭabāt (Lahore, 2007), as well as Sayyid Nis̱ār ʿAlī al-Ḥusainī al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat. ʿAllāmah ʿĀrif Ḥusain al-Ḥusainī* (Islamabad, 2011).

33 See, for example, *Mis̱āq-i khūn*, pp. 65–72, 110–118 and 142–148.

34 T. R. Khān, *Safīr-i nūr* (Lahore, 1998) and *Zindagīnāmah-i ʿallāmah shahīd ʿĀrif Ḥusain al-Ḥusainī az vilādat tā shahādat* (Qom, 1990). This academy does not seem to be active beyond compiling al-Husaini's speeches.

35 See, for example, in the context of Lebanon A. R. Norton, *Amal and the Shiʿa* (Austin, 1987), pp. 13–36.

36 M. A. ʿĀrifī, "Shīʿiyān-i Pākistān", *Faṣlnāmah-i takhaṣṣuṣī-yi Shīʿahshināsī*, I, 3–4 (2003), p. 209.

against.[37] Mariam Abou Zahab holds that Shiʿi organisations were in general "apolitical and concerned with rituals and the organisation of Muharram processions only".[38] Andreas Rieck complicates this picture in his close study of intra-Shiʿa rivalries, pointing to the mid-1960s as a period of organisational change. The influential *ʿalim* Sayyid Muhammad Dihlavi (1899–1971)[39] managed to bring together 250 Shiʿi *ʿulama* at a convention in Karachi and later established *Shiʿa Mutalabat* [Demands] *Committees* all over the country. Dihlavi and his movement called for the full freedom and protection of self-flagellation (*ʿazadari*), separate religious instruction in public schools and the administration of Shiʿi *awqaf* [religious endowments] by Shiʿas only. Faced with repeated delaying tactics and bans on public speaking, they set an ultimatum for the Pakistani government in July 1967 to accept their "apolitical, religious and constitutional demands" within three months.[40] When finally some 15,000 Shiʿas gathered in Rawalpindi three months later to discuss the strategy for the suggested civil disobedience campaign, the Ayub Khan government relented to these demands – only days before its final downfall.[41] Given this *ʿulama*-led campaign, it is tempting to agree with Andreas Rieck's evaluation that "the new wave of Shia mobilisation in Pakistan following the Iranian revolution and Zia ul-Haq's Islamisation policy drew on long experiences from the 1950s and 1960s".[42] Especially if we consider Dihlavi's role, who had received his entire Shiʿi education in India, Abou Zahab's argument, widely shared by Iranian authors,[43] about the apolitical and solely rituals-focused outlook of Shiʿi scholars before the Iranian revolution needs to be qualified.[44] Even after 1979 the TNFJ under

[37] Abou Zahab, "The politicization", p. 97. For a similar view, see also M. D. Ahmed, "The Shiʿis of Pakistan", in *Shiʿism, Resistance, and Revolution*, (ed.) M. Kramer (Boulder, 1987), pp. 280–281.

[38] M. Abou Zahab, "The regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan", in *Pakistan, Nationalism without a Nation*, (ed.) C. Jaffrelot (London, 2002), p. 116.

[39] On his biography, see Naqvī, *Tazkirah*, pp. 254–256. Being a prolific writer and gifted orator, Dihlavi was referred to as the "greatest preacher" (*khatib-i aʿzam*) in the Shiʿi community.

[40] A. Rieck, "The struggle for equal rights as a minority: Shia communal organizations in Pakistan, 1948–1968", in *The Twelver Shia*, (eds.) R. Brunner and W. Ende, pp. 278–280.

[41] These rights were conceded gradually by the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, only to be revoked again under Zia ul-Haq in 1978. See *ibid.*, pp. 282–283.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 283.

[43] See, for example, M. A. ʿĀrifī, *Junbish-i islāmī-yi Pākistān: Barrasī-yi avāmil-i nākāmī dar ījād-i niẓām-i islāmī* (Qom, 2003), p. 120.

[44] Such a claim might be especially problematic when intended to cover the whole of Pakistan. Andreas Rieck has shown elsewhere that "the lack of a meaningful political representation of the Northern Areas people, both under British and Dogra rule and ever since their

the leadership of Mufti Jaʿfar Husain (d. 1983)[45] seems to have operated according to the time-honoured strategy of confronting the state to secure Shiʿi rights without any obvious Iranian ideological input. Mufti Jaʿfar's approach manifested itself in the famous, strong Shiʿa backlash in June 1980 after the government had promulgated its determination to deduct *zakat* [obligatory Islamic charity payment] from all bank accounts held by Pakistani Muslims. The Shiʿa – due to far-reaching legal differences in this regard – vehemently opposed all these plans.[46] Protests culminated in a two-day siege of Islamabad's government district by Shiʿi demonstrators from across Pakistan on 5 July 1980, which openly defied the ban on public gatherings under martial law. Faced with strong Shiʿi protest and significant pressure brought to bear on Pakistan by revolutionary Iran, the Zia regime finally capitulated.[47] The events of that day led to the so-called Islamabad Agreement, according to which the Shiʿa were free to administer internal affairs in keeping with their law. This success became a point of reference for the movement in later times when the unfulfilled promises of the agreement were held up against Zia.[48] As we shall see below, Sayyid ʿArif al-Husaini saw himself very much as heir to this confrontational legacy, which at times even overshadowed his commitment to the specific, transnational slogans of the Iranian revolution. These local influences in al-Husaini's thought are even more palpable when we turn next to the heated intra-Shiʿi debates on reform.

Shaikhis, Shiʿi-Wahhabis and rhetorics of reform

We still lack a thorough understanding of intellectual debates among Shiʿi scholars of the late colonial period and thus have to rely mostly on

accession to Pakistan, (…) has helped the Shiʿa *ulamā'* a lot to win positions of influence within the local society, apparently unmatched in any other part of Pakistan". See A. Rieck, "A stronghold of Shiʿa orthodoxy in Northern Pakistan", in *Islamstudien ohne Ende. Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag*, (eds.) R. Brunner *et al* (Würzburg, 2002), p. 402.

45 Jaʿfar Husain was born in Gujranwala in 1916 and studied in both Lucknow and Najaf before embarking on a teaching career in Pakistan. In 1949, he was chosen as a member of the Board of Islamic Education and served two terms under Ayub Khan on the Council of Islamic Ideology (see Naqvī, *Tazkirah*, pp. 70–72).

46 Zaman, "Sectarianism", p. 396.

47 Nasr, "Iranian Revolution", p. 88. Not all authors regard Iran's involvement as decisive. See A. Haydar, "The politicization of the Shias and the development of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria in Pakistan", in *Pakistan, 1992*, (ed.) C. H. Kennedy (Westview, 1992), p. 81, and S. A. Tirmazi, *Profiles of Intelligence* (Lahore, 1995), p. 272.

48 Shiʿi leaders repeatedly referred to this success: see *Rizakār* (1985).

Sayyid Hussain ʻArif Naqvi's account of the controversy over Shaikhism, which he portrays primarily as a 'foreign', Indian import. Since no serious institution of higher Shiʻi learning existed in Pakistan at the time of Partition, nearly all influential scholars who emigrated to the new-born country had received their training in Lucknow where *shaikhi* leanings supposedly were widespread.[49] These *muhajir*s did not encounter any real doctrinal opposition due to the relative 'unsophistication' of the locals: scholars residing within the boundaries of today's Pakistan were rather late to establish bonds with eminent *mujtahid*s in Iraq.[50] Naqvi stresses the elitist twist of the immigrants' religious views: in advocating God's delegation (*tafwid*) of some of his powers, like control over creation, to the Shiʻite Imams, they claimed that "laymen could not comprehend such things".[51] In the early 1960s, when these and other hallmark *shaikhi* themes were put into book form, some scholars lately returned from the Middle East, ready to confront the theological challenge to Shiʻi orthodoxy. Pakistani *ʻulama* had been eager to catch up and take advantage of the intrinsically international Shiʻi experience of learning, bracing themselves for Najaf.[52] The 1960s were arguably the heyday of Shiʻi religious students rushing to the Iraqi shrine cities, followed by a steep decline in the 1970s caused by the Iraqi government's stricter visa policies.[53] The reformist voices of the 1960s attacked 'superstitious' rituals and accused their colleagues, who had been exclusively trained in the subcontinent, of deifying the *ahl al-bait*, the members of Muhammad's household. One of the most influential proponents of reform was Muhammad Husain Dhakku (b. 1933). He had studied in Najaf from 1954 until 1960[54] and upon his return to Pakistan served as the principal of the *Dar al-ʻUlum Muhammadiyya* in Sargodha (founded in 1949), then the most influential Shiʻi religious

[49] Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 140. For a recent endorsement of Naqvi's portrayal of Lucknow, see Muḥammad Akram ʻĀrifī, *Shīʻiiyān-i Pākistān* (Qom, 2007). It is important to note that *shaikhi* can easily be (mis)used as a derogatory phrase to slander opponents who are more inclined to the inherent esoteric potentials of Shiʻism and should thus be viewed with caution. The Indian *mujtahid* Sayyid ʻAli Naqi Naqvi (d. 1988), writing about the Shaikhi school in 1934, remarks that they had only a very marginal influence in northern India. See ʻAlī Naqī Naqvī, *Bāb ō mazhab-i Bahāʾī* (Lucknow, 1934), pp. 128–129.

[50] Rieck, "A Stronghold", p. 390.

[51] Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 135.

[52] On this feature of Shiʻism see also S. Mervin, "Transnational intellectual debates", in *The Shiʻa Worlds*, (ed.) Mervin, pp. 321–346.

[53] Rieck, "A stronghold", pp. 292–294. It was only after the Iranian revolution that Qom and Mashhad fully replaced the Iraqi centres of learning.

[54] For a list of his teachers, see Naqvī, *Tazkirah*, p. 295.

seminary in Pakistan.[55] Dhakku was enraged that in his view "the majority of Shiite preachers (…) were making their listeners happy by simply stressing the virtues of the *ahl al-bait* without exhorting them to perform good deeds".[56] He thought it necessary to guide both the preachers and the common people "on the right path". A milestone in this respect was the translation of Ibn Babawayh al-Saduq's (d. 991) influential creed work *Risalat al-Iʿtiqadat*[57] into Urdu, along with lengthy commentaries by Dhakku. With this book, the ground was laid for a controversy that was still raging more than three decades later. Dhakku "presented his own views on 'correct beliefs' about the Shiʿi Imams and other subjects in a categorical manner while at the same time mincing no words in his refutation of what he considered *ghulûw*[58] and *tafwîz* propagated by most preachers in Pakistan at that time".[59] He directly attacked some well-established scholars such as Muhammad Bashir ʿAnsari (d. 1983)[60] or Muhammad Ismaʿil (d. 1974)[61], accusing them of deliberately twisting the truth. According to Dhakku, these scholars had always opposed the founding of Shiʿi seminaries in the country because they wanted to safeguard their monopoly of religious learning, considering the Shiʿas of Pakistan "a gold-mine, from which they served themselves with both hands".[62] Dhakku's opponents did not remain silent. They charged him with downgrading the *ahl al-bait* and saw in him a narrow-minded, fanatic *shiʿi-wahhabi* and a reductionist *qashri ʿalim* – a scholar who is only concerned with the exoteric aspects [literally: the husk] of religious teaching.[63] Even more radical in the rejection of Dhakku's views was Ansari himself, calling for his total social boycott while denouncing him as a *nasibi*, an enemy of the Prophet's household.[64]

55 See Sayyid Muḥammad Saqlain Kāẓmī, *Imāmiyah dīnī madāris-i Pākistān* (Lahore, 2007), pp. 185–187.

56 Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 141.

57 For a discussion of this work, see A. A. A. Fyzee "The creed of Ibn Bābawayhi", *Journal of Bombay University*, XII (1943), pp. 70–86.

58 Denoting "exaggerated", extremist Shiʿi beliefs.

59 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 148.

60 Ansari was born in 1901 in the North Indian city of Shikarpur and combined a religious education with a secular college degree in Comparative Science of Religion. He became a Shiʿi missionary (*muballigh*) in Pakistan and is credited with large-scale conversions during public debates (*munazarat*) with Sunni opponents. Naqvi regards him as one of the most important propagandists of the *shaikhiyya* in Pakistan (Naqvī, *Taẕkirah*, pp. 276–279).

61 He became known as *muballigh-i aʿẓam* [the greatest Shiʿi missionary] and allegedly revealed his *shaikhi* leanings only rather late in life (Naqvī, *Taẕkirah*, pp. 260–264).

62 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 150.

63 Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 142.

64 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 152.

The Shiʿi *ʿulama* of Pakistan thus became pinned against each other. The reformist camp around Dhakku was primarily represented in institutions of higher religious learning and hence could influence new generations of students and teachers. The so-called *shaikhis*, on the other hand, dominated the pulpit at Shiʿi religious gatherings (*majalis*).[65] Outside involvement kindled the flames of discord as well: from late 1974 the conflict intensified due to increased activities of the leaders of two branches of the *shaikhiyya* school of thought, Ayatollah ʿAbd al-Rida Ibrahimi Kermani (d. 1979), based in Kerman in Eastern Iran, and Ayatollah Mirza Hasan al-Ha'iri al-Ihqaqi (d. 2000), who resided in Kuwait. Both tried to expand their influence in Pakistan with financial help to religious institutions and the distribution of literature.[66] Anti-*shaikhiyya* publications, on the other hand, made use of quotations by leading Iranian scholars to argue against the school.[67] A genuine reconciliation between the rival camps never took place, with this internal splintering haunting the new Shiʿi organisations founded after the Iranian Revolution.[68]

I argue that al-Husaini at times sat quite uncomfortably between these two camps. While his 'third wave' positions definitely harkened back to some of the concerns of the reformist camp, he repeatedly criticised the latter for embracing a too narrow and too overly apolitical Shiʿi outlook. At the same time, al-Husaini faced serious opposition from more traditionalist-minded ʿ*ulama* who had broken away from the TNFJ, concluding on 21 May 1985 a separate agreement with the government on the legalisation of ʿ*azadari* processions.[69] Naqvi points out the *shaikhi* leanings of this group, to which al-Husaini also repeatedly referred when emphasising his disagreement with their leader Sayyid Hamid ʿAli Shah Mousavi over attributing extensive powers to the Imams.[70] The Shiʿi community was obviously highly confused by this open display of conflict, reflected by the frequency with which al-Husaini was questioned to prove that he was not a self-made fraud.[71] Given this challenge and in order to make his case as the proper representative of the community, al-Husaini criss-crossed Pakistan, delivering sermons in Urdu as

65 Naqvi, "The controversy" p. 143.
66 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 198.
67 Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 146.
68 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 204.
69 See *Riẓakār* IL, 25 (1 July 1985) for an extensive discussion of this agreement.
70 Naqvi, "The controversy", p. 147. Al-Ḥusainī, *Mis̱āq-i khūn*, pp. 206–207.
71 See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 199.

well as in his native Pashtu in a hitherto unknown "revolutionary way" (*bah surat-i inqilabi*).[72]

A bloody police crackdown seems to have finally been the decisive impetus for turning al-Husaini into a 'real' leader. When 13 demonstrators died and hundreds were imprisoned on 5 July 1985 in Quetta while demanding the implementation of the Islamabad Agreement of 1980, al-Husaini had finally found a cause to rally the Shi'i masses behind him.[73] In 1987, al-Husaini announced that the TNFJ would transform itself into a political party, demanding that each recognised *madhhab* should be governed by its own interpretation of what the Qur'an and *sunna* mean. Additionally, Pakistan's various Islamic schools of thought should be given representation in the Council of Islamic Ideology and a "Popular Islamic Army" should be created to help reduce the distance between the military and the people. Muhammad Qasim Zaman suggests that these demands probably disquieted the Sunnis since they could entail that "Islam should mean different things to different people, their call to a popular army stoked fear of Shi'i sectarianism and freedom of religion would mean freedom to curse".[74] Al-Husaini had no time left, however, to prove himself in the arena of party politics. His assassination in Peshawar on 5 August 1988, in close conjunction with Zia ul-Haq's death and the end of the Iran–Iraq war just some days later, arguably "marked the end of the short heyday of political radicalism among Shias in Pakistan".[75]

Localising the revolution

How did this new 'revolutionary way' manifest itself in al-Husaini's rhetoric? In order to evaluate his indebtedness to the Iranian experience, the following discussion is structured according to hallmark themes of Iran's attempted export of the revolution (*sudur-i inqilab*), discussing (a) calls for Muslim unity, (b) the centrality of Imam Khomeini and Iran, (c) authority of the *'ulama* and religious awakening and (d) political activism. This categorisation is intended to help determine which efforts al-Husaini exerted in trying to adjust the broader Iranian framework to his specific Pakistani context. I would argue that such an adaption definitely took place, even though al-

72 For a sample of his extensive travelling schedule in 1986, see Naqvī, *Tażkirah*, pp. 159–160.

73 The prisoners were finally released in late April 1986. See *Riżakār*, L, 17 (1 May 1986).

74 Zaman, "Sectarianism", p. 696.

75 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 259. Whereas Rieck holds that the murder was carried out by circles tied to Zia ul-Haq, others have blamed Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Khān, *Zindagīnāmah*, pp. 91–93).

Husaini's language was at first glance couched in a very faithful rendering of Iran's revolutionary rhetoric. If we read his speeches and interviews closely, however, it becomes clear that he felt compelled to modify the universalist message due to heated internal Shi'i debates and a specific Pakistani legacy of political activism and confrontation with the government.

(i) *Calling for Muslim unity*

One of the major topics of revolutionary Iranian discourse revolved around the call for *taqrib*, an endeavoured *rapprochement* with the Sunnis. Such a closing of ranks seemed essential for Khomeini's goal to establish an ideal, global Islamic system. This new order should encompass the entire Muslim *umma* and be modelled on the example of Iran, which represents the 'pure Muhammadan Islam' (*islam-i nab-i muhammadi*). The world's Muslims, to be sure, were weak, at odds with each other and affected by moral corruption. Yet, revolutionary Iran emphasised that it did not hold Sunni Islam *per se* responsible for preventing Muslim unity, but rather the conspiring superpowers. In order to show its willingness to come to term with Sunnis on practical terms, hostile sectarian publications were banned in Iran after the revolution, along with the public cursing of the first three caliphs (*sabb va la'n*) or the celebration of the murder of the second caliph 'Umar (d. 644) ('*Umar kushan*). Additionally, Khomeini ruled that Shi'as should end their habit of praying separately from Sunnis during the *hajj*.[76]

As far as Sayyid 'Arif is concerned, the dominating theme of *taqrib* ran through nearly all of his speeches and was clearly situated in the context of sectarian violence and conflict. Underlining that *rapprochement* with the Sunnis was no mere theoretical consideration for him, al-Husaini repeatedly referred to his personal working relationships even with Deobandi and Ahl-i Hadis scholars.[77] He was at pains to convince the Sunnis that the two *madhhab*s were not each others' enemy. Rather, they were both facing a common opponent: polytheism (*shirk*) and unbelief (*kufr*) along with global imperialism, which threatened the whole Islamic world irrespective of its sectarian affiliation. Especially then, after these powers had failed to

[76] W. Buchta, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit: 1979–1996* (Hamburg, 1997), pp. 64—77.

[77] Al-Husaini at one point approached his fellow Pashtu speaker Maulana Fazl ur-Rahman of the Jami'at-i 'Ulama-i Islam with the suggestion of forming a united party to advocate the Islamic revolution. At a discussion forum, organised by the newspaper *Jang*, the TNFJ representative yielded his time to no one less than Ihsan Ilahi Zahir to continue his critique of the government's proposed Shari'at Bill (Al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat*, pp. 39–41).

turn back the clock in Iran and Lebanon, they were aiming at Pakistan.[78] If his organisation was calling for the establishment of an Islamic system in Pakistan, they were not advocating sectarianism (*firqah variyyat*) but striving for a system in which all individual creeds were respected.[79] Al-Husaini turned the famous (if contested) *hadith* "*ikhtilaf ummati rahma*" [disagreement among my community is a blessing][80] on its head when he argued that disagreements among Muslims had to be regarded as the soldiers of Satan (*shaitan ke junud*). Every single statement which harmed the *umma* and benefited the superpowers had to be rejected.[81] Al-Husaini also tried to connect with 'classical' *taqrib* efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by mentioning the 'early heroes' Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh and Mahmud Shaltut.[82] He called on all Muslims to form one line in prayer and prostration before God, not before the East or the West:[83] Shi'as should simply attend the mosque closest to their home, be it Sunni or Shi'i, for Friday prayers.[84]

The antagonistic context of Pakistan entered the frame in a rather one-sided way. Even though al-Husaini also called on the Shi'a not to insult the Sunnis for their particular prayers during the month of Ramadan (*tarawih*), the latter were supposed to accept '*azadari* as a custom prescribed by God (*sha'a'ir-i Allah*).[85] Additionally, al-Husaini insisted that *sunna* was of course not restricted to the deeds and sayings of the Prophet but included the Shi'i Imams as well.[86] The last question in particular has usually, along with other decisive differences in the fields of law and theology, been avoided in Iranian discourse and seriously calls into doubt the feasibility of sectarian harmony.[87] Al-Husaini was obviously forced to lay emphasis on these Shi'i particularities because his internal opponents accused him of denigrating the *ahl al-bait*. In the run-up to the TNFJ-led Qur'an and Sunna Conference on 6 July

---

78 Khān, *Zindagīnāmah*, p. 102.

79 See, for example, al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, p. 27.

80 See Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, p. 237. This saying is missing in all major Sunni *hadith* collections but is widely cited in authoritative Shi'i sources.

81 Al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, p. 25 and *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 30–31, 81. See also M. Lodhi, "Pakistan's Shia movement: An interview with Arif Hussaini", *Third World Quarterly*, X, 2 (1988), p. 813.

82 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 52 and *idem.*, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, p. 33.

83 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, p. 110.

84 Al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat*, p. 80.

85 Al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, p. 80.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

87 Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, p. 101.

1987 in Lahore, they organised a rival Qur'an and Ahl al-Bait Conference, demanded that the government revoke the permission for al-Husaini's event and even carried out a bomb attack on the city's railway station to scare away prospective participants.[88]

(ii) *Centrality of Imam Khomeini and the Iranian example*

Even though stretching out their hands to the Sunnis, Iran always emphasised the centrality of its supreme leader (*rahbar*). Khomeini and his successor Khamenei were hailed as being nearly infallible (*qarib-i ma'sum*) and addressed as the ruler of the Muslim world (*vali-yi amr-i muslimin-i jahan*).[89] Al-Husaini's ecumenism faced the same limitations when he singled out Khomeini as the only personality able to break the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union, which planned to splinter the Muslim world.[90] The fundamentally different, altruistic Iranian approach, according to al-Husaini, was on display in Afghanistan, where the Islamic Republic was the only outside player to provide uninterested help for the sake of Islam.[91] In the same way as the Muslim *umma* only had one *ka'ba*, it needed to rally around one single leader (*yaki rahbar vahidi*).[92] Putting it even more starkly, al-Husaini insisted that no Islamic movement (*harakat-i islami*) which did not acknowledge Iran's centrality (*markaziyyat*) could be accepted as Islamic.[93] This overarching importance of Iran and its leader might also have to do with the special access to help from the unseen world (*ghaibi madad*) with which Khomeini was blessed in al-Husaini's view.[94] After extolling the Shi'i Imams with the customary eulogies, Khomeini was addressed by him with distinct but similar sounding phrases, thus conveying a connection to the audience which went beyond Khomeini being only the rightful representative

---

88 Al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat*, p. 19.

89 K. Amirpur, "A doctrine in the making? Velayat-e Faqih in post-revolutionary Iran", in *Speaking for Islam. Religious authorities in Muslim societies*, (eds.) G. Krämer and S. Schmidtke (Leiden, 2006), pp. 229–230, and W. Buchta, "Tehran's ecumenical society (Majma' al-Taqrīb): A veritable ecumenical revival or a Trojan horse of Iran?", in *The Twelver Shia*, eds. Brunner and Ende, pp. 334–335. See also N. Calder, "Accommodation and revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and the classical tradition", in *Shi'ism, State and Government*, (eds.) P. Luft and C. Turner (London, 2008), pp. 53–54.

90 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 73, 120–122.

91 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, p. 169.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 171.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

94 Al-Ḥusainī, *Sukhn-i 'ishq*, p. 71.

of the Hidden Imam (*na'ib-i bar ḥaqq-i Imam-i zaman*).[95] Given the Iranian leader's superior insights, an Islamic Revolution modelled after the example of Iran was the only thinkable solution for Pakistan's woes, even though ʿArif al-Husaini constantly denied that his organisation had a violent upheaval in mind.[96] On the other hand, al-Husaini hardly ever indicated how he aimed to achieve this lofty goal, nor did he elaborate his position on the meaning of *vilayat-i faqih* in the context of Pakistan, preferring instead simply to oppose the government. In an interview with the Pakistani newspaper *Muslim* he tried hard to evade the question as to whether he preferred elections over revolution in Pakistan. Similarly, he was at pains to restrict the applicability of the Iranian model solely to Pakistan's economic sphere.[97] He and the *Tahrik* would support any real Islamic system worldwide; it was a mere coincidence that Iran was a Shiʿi country.[98]

(iii) *Awakening and the leadership role of the ʿulama*

The leadership of the jurist also meant in general a new, central role for the *ʿulama* in Iranian society,[99] a topic which was of utmost importance to al-Husaini. In the early 1980s, religious scholars faced stiff competition from popular preachers (*zakirs*) who exerted firm control over Shiʿi mourning sessions (*majalis*).[100] This particular Pakistani challenge found its way into al-Husaini's arguments when he repeatedly called on his audience to accept *ʿulama* leadership, lamenting at the same time that many parts of the country were still devoid of their presence.[101] While the rank of *marjaʿ al-taqlid* [source of emulation] was reserved exclusively for Khomeini, lower-ranking scholars in Pakistan could still provide true guidance. They played a crucial role, for example, in identifying the substantial amount of weak *hadith* material in the Shiʿi compendia, which among other things promotes *tanasukh*, the transmigration of souls, or displays influences of errant Christian and Jewish interpretations.[102]

---

95 Khomeini was *inter alia* addressed as the Destroyer of Unbelief (*kufr shikan*), the Pounder of East and West (*kubandah-i sharq o gharb*) and the Heir of ʿAli (*varis-i ʿAli*). See al-Ḥusainī, *Mis̱āq-i khūn*, p. 39

96 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, pp. 123, 129.

97 Lodhi, "Pakistan's Shiʿa movement", pp. 810–811.

98 Al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, pp. 127–128.

99 See Roy, "The Impact", p. 35.

100 Abou Zahab, "Regional Dimensions", p. 116.

101 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 34, 43, 49, 191, 237, 247.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40, 110.

It is the *'ulama* whom al-Husaini expected to prepare the way for the fundamental reform of fellow Shi'as and Pakistan at large and to facilitate an Iranian-style awakening (*bidari*).[103] In his view "before each revolution, a mental revolution is necessary. If our thinking is not overturned, we remain in ignorant sleep while being faced with conspiracies".[104] On another occasion al-Husaini compared an awakened society with a house full of lights and its residents alert, giving intruders no chance to break in and steal.[105] Awakening also meant preparing Pakistani Muslims to accept the idea of a Muslim world government (*hukumat-i jahani-yi islam*), the idea of which was to be spread by cultural work, books and conferences.[106]

Emphasising the need for *bidari*, al-Husaini explicitly criticised non-political reformists and traditionalists alike. He clearly distanced himself from Dhakku as an authority when he argued that the reform project for which this '*alim* stood was useless: the extreme exoteric approach (*qashri gari*) of his group neglected to pay attention to the authentic Islamic teachings and did not provide any solution to burning questions like Kashmir or Palestine.[107] Their apolitical stance clearly betrayed their self-identification as reformers: instead, they should be called reactionaries (*irtija'iyun*). Contrary to what these people argued, the Qur'an was not only a book of law and education but contained guidance in the fields of politics, society and economy as well.[108] Since politics is a part of religion, it is not possible for a believer to close his eyes to events unfolding both in his own country and internationally.[109] The idea that scholars have no role to play in the political realm, should only sit in the mosques, lead prayers and discuss questions revolving around the legal implication of menstruation, was a deliberate lie spread by imperialism (*samraj*).[110] The contrast between al-Husaini and other reformist voices appears even starker since, according to the former, the demands of the Shi'a movement had clearly evolved by 1987: the TNFJ was not longer calling only for a narrow implementation of Shi'i law but for an Islamic system (*islami nizam*) and an Islamic government.[111]

[103] 'Awakening' in this context is contrasted with the 'traditional' view which regarded political activism as running counter to the prescribed reliance on God's provision (*taqwa*). See Khān, *Zindagīnāmah*, pp. 32–33.

[104] Naqvī, *Tazkirah*, pp. 158–159.

[105] Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, p 103.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 107, and Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 138.

[109] Al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, pp. 64–65.

[110] *Ibid.*, Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 137.

[111] *Idem, Uslūb-i siyāsat*, pp. 63–64. See also Lodhi, "Pakistan's Shi'a movement", p. 808.

The traditionalists were, of course, on an equally wrong path. Such people only spoke according to the wishes of the people, focused on narrow sectarian issues and did not elucidate what the Qur'an and the *ahl al-bait* demanded from them.[112] While promoting ʿ*azadari*, they forgot that the real purpose of ʿ*ashura* was not the performance of certain rituals. In its essence, commemorating al-Husain meant striving to reform the *umma* and uniting all downtrodden people (*mustazafin*).[113] "If I myself am bound by the chains of flagellation (*zanjirun*), how can I set others free?" Sayyid ʿArif al-Husaini asked.[114] Making such controversial statements, the leader of the TNFJ drew on the authority of the third Shiʿi Imam himself, quoting al-Husain's proclamation during the battle of Karbala: "I did not go into battle out of impertinence or vanity, nor because I am an evil-doer or morally corrupt, but rather to demand the reform of my grandfather's *umma*".[115] If the popular preachers, despite their importance for the Shiʿi community in Pakistan, refrained from educating the people, they betrayed the "pulpit of the martyr for the whole of humanity" (*shahid-i insaniyyat ke minbar)*.[116] The last reference is a curious one since al-Husaini thus attempted to broaden the appeal of his message and to link revolutionary Iranian discourse to the leading Indian Shiʿi authority of the twentieth century, Sayyid ʿAli Naqi Naqvi, widely known as Naqqan Sahib (d. 1988). Far from politicising Karbala, ʿAli Naqi Naqvi in his famous book *Shahid-i Insaniyyat*, originally published around 1940, emphasised the universal attributes and the unique display of morals surrounding al-Husain's martyrdom to which people of all faiths could relate.[117]

Reflecting another concern of the Iranian revolution, al-Husaini repeatedly conceded a much wider role for women than many Sunni Islamists: he applauded the contribution of women in Iran after the revolution who, without neglecting their modesty, were very active in reconstructing and advancing

[112] Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 81–82, and al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat*, pp. 86–87.

[113] Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 61, and Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, 1990, p. 147.

[114] Al-Ḥusainī, *Miṣāq-i khūn*, p. 191.

[115] *Idem*, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, p. 69.

[116] Al-Tirmiẕī, *Naqīb-i vaḥdat*, p. 89.

[117] Syed Rizwan Zamir, *ʿĀlī Naqvī and his Thought* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Institute of Religious Studies, University of Virginia, 2011), p. 181. For the controversies surrounding this book, see also Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*: *Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York, 2006), p. 102. See for a new reading of how ʿAli Naqi Naqvi's reconceptualization of al-Husain pre-empted its later politicisation, Justin Jones, "Shiʿism, Humanity and Revolution in Twentieth-Century India: Selfhood and Politics in the Husainology of ʿAli Naqi Naqvi", in this volume.

their country, including as members of parliament. According to al-Husaini, they could even give religious guidance, provided that they had attained the qualification of independent legal reasoning (*ijtihad*).[118] Pakistan should follow this model and finally recognise the neglected half of its population as full, respected members of society.[119] Al-Husaini's awakening project also reflected elements of the Shi'i heritage, which stretched beyond the Iranian revolution insofar as he emphasised the role of reason and philosophy for believers: if a human being does not develop his rational faculties, perfection is not attainable.[120]

(iv) *Political activism*

Finally, for revolutionary Iran, trying to close ranks among Muslims implied lashing out against the 'Global Arrogance' (*istikbar-i jahani*). Khomeini called the United States the main enemy of all the deprived and oppressed people in the world and, as such, it had to be brought to its knees.[121] Islam offered a third path that was neither allied with the East nor the West.[122] Rhetoric against Saudi Arabia was part and parcel of this view, since Saudi princes were seen as morally degenerate, hypocritical rulers who did not obey God but their American masters.[123] Important in this regard was a speech which al-Husaini delivered in the aftermath of Muharram 1984, following large-scale attacks on Shi'is in Karachi, including arson of a mosque and dozens of houses in Liaquatabad.[124] Al-Husaini declared that the Shi'a were aware that "those Wahhabis, who wrap themselves in the mantle of Islam", were behind all these conspiracies. There could be no doubt that Pakistan's Shi'as were being betrayed by their own government which made common cause with the Saudis.[125] The latter were free to construct schools in Peshawar and to run a so-called Islamic University in Islamabad which was not worthy of this title since it accepted neither Shi'i students nor teachers and was only

118 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 127.
119 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, p. 132.
120 *Ibid.*, p. 128.
121 D. Menashri, *Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power* (London, 2001), pp. 187–188.
122 R. Ramazani, "Iran's export of the revolution: Politics, ends, and means", in *The Iranian Revolution. Its Global Impact*, (ed.) J. L. Esposito (Miami, 1990), pp. 73–75.
123 With the exception of a *Burgfrieden* policy between 1983 and 1987. See Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, pp. 84–85.
124 See Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 253.
125 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, pp. 120, 171.

set up to spread hatred among Muslims.[126] These issues served al-Husaini as examples for the unchecked spread of deviant ideas (*afkar-i munharif*) and a corrupted version of Islam that was subservient to the United States.[127] Even more deplorable, however, was Saudi Arabia's anti-Shiʿa propaganda in Mecca and Medina and the severe restrictions the country placed on pilgrimage for Shiʿas.[128] These great crimes subjected the Saudis to God's curse (*un par khuda ki laʿnat he*).[129]

While Saudi Arabia thus constituted al-Husaini's 'far enemy' with significant leverage in Pakistan, his political activism was even more frequently directed against the government of his own country, in the process drawing on and expanding a longstanding Shiʿi theme. Al-Husaini was constantly denying that Pakistan under Zia deserved in any way to be termed an Islamic Republic, given not only the alliance of the country with the United States but also due to widespread exploitation, immorality and immodesty and a general disregard for Islam.[130] The political system itself was immoral (*fasid*) and wrong (*ghalat*) since Western laws and culture dominated.[131] The government which came to power in the name of religion was, in al-Husaini's view, nothing more than a disgrace for Islam (*Islam ko bad nam kar rahe hen*).[132]

It is interesting to note that al-Husaini remained extremely steady in his anti-Saudi and anti-government rhetoric, even in the years between 1983 and 1987 when Khomeini deliberately toned down any attacks on the kingdom due to the Iran–Iraq war. The Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia even reached a sort of compromise as far as limited Iranian demonstrations in Mecca during the *hajj* were concerned.[133] Sayyid ʿArif Husain al-Husaini was obviously unimpressed and continued explicitly to identify Wahhabism as the primary enemy of Shiʿas worldwide. Al-Husaini and Iran were likewise at odds with regard to the scholar's native country when the Iranian government actively reached out to Pakistan, eager to establish good relations with their neighbours and refraining from any criticism in public.[134] These diplomatic

126 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 200.
127 *Ibid.*, p. 73, and Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, pp. 169, 191.
128 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, pp. 196–197. For a discussion of tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia in this regard, see W. S. Harrop, "Pakistan and revolutionary Iran: Adjusting to necessity", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, XIII, 1–2 (1989), p. 120.
129 Al-Ḥusainī, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, pp. 327–329.
130 Khān, *Zindagīnamāh*, p. 122.
131 Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 50, and *idem*, *Uslūb-i siyāsat*, pp. 136, 318.
132 *Ibid.*, Al-Ḥusainī, *Guftār-i ṣidq*, p. 149.
133 Buchta, *Die Iranische Schia*, pp. 84–85.
134 Harrop, "Pakistan and revolutionary Iran", p. 125.

overtures were actively resisted by al-Husaini whose anti-Zia stance went as far as refraining from welcoming ʿAli Khamenei, then Iran's president, at the airport when he made a state visit to Pakistan in January 1986. Although al-Husaini justified his decision by pointing out that he intended not to lend the slightest legitimacy to Zia ul-Haq, Khamenei reportedly strongly disapproved of his radicalism.[135]

Conclusion: beyond the lone revolutionary

Probably these last observations most clearly demonstrate the limits of control that the Iranians could hope to exert over the Pakistani propagators of their revolutionary mission.[136] At first glance, al-Husaini's speeches with their adamant critique of imperialism and the constant call for Muslim unity strike the reader as not particularly geared towards a Pakistani audience. Yet, if we pay close attention to the different camps of scholars and Shiʿi organisations in the country, we can discern particular currents in al-Husaini's rhetoric that go beyond the preliminary assumption that he was simply delivering blind carbon-copied directives emanating from Tehran. For example, as a minority in Pakistan, identity politics are of a much more decisive concern for the Shiʿa than for their Iranian co-religionists. It follows that *taqrib* can work only to an extent. Hence, al-Husaini was probably forced to bring up divisive arguments like the corpus of *hadiths* transmitted from the Shiʿi Imams, or to emphasise the sacred, divinely prescribed character of ʿ*azadari*, in order to cater to his audience, which felt very threatened by the state and society at large. Additionally, the power of his apolitical reformist and *shaikhi* opponents appears to be much stronger than in the context of Iran. The latter might have to do with the absence of equally sophisticated clerical structures in Pakistan and the formidable challenge staged by very active popular preachers. Related to this point is the specific question as to whether the institution of the *marjaʿiyya*, the adoption of a senior scholar as a source of emulation, had and has indeed taken root in Pakistan.[137] Scholars who

---

135 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 255. See also the coverage in *Riẕākār*, L, 2–3 (16 January 1986).

136 Scholars have made similar observations in the context of other countries such as Lebanon or the Gulf states. See, for example, R. Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shiʿite Lebanon. Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York, 2008), pp. 195–210 and Laurence Louër, "The rise and fall of revolutionary utopias in the Gulf monarchies", in *The Shiʿa Worlds and Iran*, (ed.) Mervin, pp. 84–87.

137 In the context of Afghanistan and its Hazara Shiʿa minority, Bindemann noticed a transformation during the 1980s. Authority shifted from the Sufi orders (*tariqat*), headed by a *pir*, to the ʿ*ulama* and to a discourse more dominated by references to *shariʿa* than

argue in the affirmative point out that after the death of Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim in 1970, most Pakistanis accepted Abu ʿl-Qasim al-Khuʾi (d. 1992) as their *marjaʿ*. This decision, so this argument runs, presumably limited the revolutionary influence of Khomeini and the appeal of the Iranian conception of *vilayat-i faqih* [the rule of the jurisprudent] in the subcontinent.[138] Other students of Pakistani Shiʿas have challenged this view, arguing that the concept of *marjaʿiyya* is not meaningful at all in the context of Pakistan. In the mid-1980s Nikki Keddie's interlocutors were unable to mention "an actual issue or occasion on which they had followed such clerical guidance".[139] David Pinault, conducting research on Pakistani Shiʿas, 17 years later in 2002, made similar observations. Many of the members of the community whom he interviewed "seemed altogether unfamiliar even with the concept of the *marja*".[140]

If we take this empirical evidence seriously, such a dearth of 'religious literacy' was surely not due to a lack of trying, especially in the light of intensive discussions on the authority of the *marajiʿ* and their local representatives in the 1960s and 1970s. Emphases of their importance not only filled the pages of the most influential Pakistani Shiʿi journals but were also voiced by various Shiʿi missionary organisations in the decades before the Iranian Revolution. Additionally, besides Khomeini and al-Khuʾi, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Kazim Sharʿiatmadari, head of the *Dar al-Tabligh-i Islami* [The house of Islamic preaching] in Qom, had an extensive and vocal following in Pakistan that continued to support him even after he was put under house arrest as a consequence of his alleged involvement in a coup against the Islamic Republic in 1982.[141] If all these efforts failed to sway the majority of Pakistan's Shiʿa

personal charisma. See R. Bindemann, *Religion und Politik bei den schiitischen Hazâra in Afghanistan, Iran und Pakistan* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 34–37.

138 Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, p. 194. Vali Nasr writes that in the late 1980s South Asian Shiʿas referred to al-Khuʾi with the same lofty titles Iran used to address Khomeini. They regarded Khomeini only as a leader in political matters, whereas in religious questions they were followers of al-Khuʾi, who also received most of their *khums*. See Nasr, "The Iranian revolution", p. 339.

139 N. R. Keddie, "Shīʿism and Change: Secularism and Myth", in *Shīʿite heritage. Essays on classical and modern traditions*, (ed.) L. Clarke (Binghamton, 2001), p. 400.

140 D. Pinault, *Notes from the Fortune-Telling Parrot: Islam and the Struggle for Religious Pluralism in Pakistan* (London, 2008), p. 79.

141 For an extensive discussion, see my paper, "Tapping sources: the marājiʿ and their followers in Pakistan", presented at the workshop 'Traditional Authority and Transnational Religious Networks in Contemporary Shiʿi Islam', Keble College, Oxford, 7–9 January 2013. On Shariʿatmadari, see E. Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley, 1999), pp. 157–159.

to submit to the authority of high-ranking scholars beyond the country's borders, it becomes clearer why al-Husaini was forced to spend so much time on extolling the political and religious leadership of Khomeini in order to keep his 'third wave' rolling.

Contributors

Francis Robinson is Professor of History of South Asia, Royal Holloway, University of London. Since 1973, he has been Lecturer, Reader, Professor and Senior Vice-Principal at Royal Holloway. His research interests lie in history of the Islamic world since the eighteenth century. He has particular interest in religious change, learned and holy men, and Islam in South Asia.

Sajjad Rizvi is Associate Professor of Islamic Intellectual History and Head of the Department at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Currently, he is working on a comparative study of philosophical systems and networks in North India and Iran in the time of the decline of empire in the eighteenth century, as well as completing two contracted monographs on Mir Damad (for Oneworld) and on Mulla Sadra's theory of the soul.

Michel Boivin is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies (National Center of Scientific Research) and teaches History and Anthropology of Muslim communities in colonial and post-colonial South Asia at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris, France. He is mainly interested in analyzing the encounter between Islam and Hinduism, through the construction of religious authority, cultural production and ritual field.

Muhammad Amir Ahmad Khan is a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge. His work focuses on the effect of poetry on the formation of North Indian Muslim political identity between 1850–1950. In addition to his academic interests, Ali is also a columnist and has contributed articles to *The Guardian* (UK), *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times, The Daily Times* (Pakistan) and other international magazines and newspapers. His areas of interest are linked to the politics, culture and religion of South Asia and Greater West Asia.

Justin Jones is Associate Professor in the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford. He works on Islamic societies in modern South Asia, and is the author of numerous publications including *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (2012).

Soumen Mukherjee is Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Presidency University, Kolkata. He holds a doctoral degree in the History of South Asia from the University of Heidelberg, Germany. In 2011, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Mukherjee has researched and published in the areas of socio-religious and intellectual history of modern South Asia with particular focus on questions of identity, religious normativities and social service, and histories of South Asian diasporas and religious networks on the Indian Ocean.

Shireen Mirza is Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. In particular, her research involves ethnographic studies among urban Muslim communities to understand the production of slums and ghettos, as spatial and discursive processes involved in the becoming of minority identities in contemporary India.

Tahir Kamran is currently Allama Iqbal fellow at the University of Cambridge and fellow of Wolfson College. He works on South Asian Islam, with special focus on sectarian militancy and radical Islam. He has published several articles and book chapters for edited volumes on denominational conflict, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the Majlis-i-Ahrar and Salafi extremism.

Amir Khan Shahid is a doctoral student at Government College University, Lahore, working on the rise of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement in Punjab.

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs is a doctoral student at Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University. He is primarily interested in modern negotiations of the Islamic tradition on a global scale. Simon's dissertation "Debating Shi'ism in 20th and 21st Pakistan. Orthodoxy, Reform, and the Limits of the Transnational" traces shifting conceptions of religious authority, the intellectual reception of the Iranian revolution and the changing nature of sectarianism in South Asia. His work has appeared in *Modern Asian Studies,* the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *Die Welt des Islams* and *Contemporary Islam.*

Ali Usman Qasmi is Assistant Professor of History at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). He is the author of *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Qur'an Movements in the Punjab* (2011) and *The Ahmadis and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan* (2014). Besides, he has published articles in journals such as *Modern Asian Studies*, *The Muslim World* and *The Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*. Qasmi is also a visiting research fellow in History at the Royal Holloway College, University of London.

Index